This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

# MILDRED'S MISTAKE

## A STILL LIFE STUDY

BY [illegible] LEVIEN

600057541S

# MILDRED'S MISTAKE

MILDRED.

# MILDRED'S MISTAKE

## A Still-Life Study

by

A. LEVIEN.

Author of

LITTLE ADA'S JEWELS,

&c.

MARCUS WARD & CO.
LONDON & BELFAST.

# MILDRED'S MISTAKE

## A Still-Life Study

BY

F. LEVIEN

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE ADA'S JEWELS," &c.

"Bring me wild flowers, happy wild flowers!"

London:

MARCUS WARD & CO., 67, CHANDOS STREET

AND ROYAL ULSTER WORKS, BELFAST

1877

251. c. 573

# CONTENTS.


| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | Breaking the News | 7 |
| II. | Rather Alarming | 26 |
| III. | A Wedding | 45 |
| IV. | Unreal Reality | 64 |
| V. | Fortune-Telling | 85 |
| VI. | A Mischance | 105 |
| VII. | Sick and Sorry | 123 |
| VIII. | Five o'clock Tea | 144 |
| IX. | Christmas Decorations | 165 |
| X. | A Diamond Ring | 185 |
| XI. | Doubts and Changes | 205 |
| XII. | Trouville-sur-Mer | 228 |
| XIII. | A Calm Evening | 253 |

# Illustrations.


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| MILDRED (p. 8). . . . . *Frontispiece.* | |
| "THE END OF THEIR WALK WAS A PRETTY GARDEN" | 24 |
| MILLY, ATTIE, AND LOUIS . . . . . | 62 |
| DECORATING THE CHURCH . . . . . | 200 |
| "SHE SAT LOOKING AND THINKING" . . . | 240 |

# MILDRED'S MISTAKE.

## CHAP. I.—BREAKING THE NEWS.

"I WONDER," wrote Mildred Braithwaite in her private journal, "if it is a pleasant thing to be a Genius. My sister Beatrice is no doubt a Genius" (Mildred put a big G to show her reverence for the character), "and it must be very nice to be as clever as she is. But then, I should not like to be so careless of my hats, and to make my jackets so dusty. Besides, it would be so tiresome to have to admire only great, beautiful things; I should like to love poor, pretty little things also."

Having reached this point in her deep and philosophical reflections, Mildred stopped a moment, and

looked out of the window. It was a picturesque "lattice" in a bower of Virginian creeper, with the prospect of a pleasant garden lying in the hush of a summer afternoon. Mildred's thoughts wandered a little out in the sunshine among the flowers, and did not return to the journal at once.

"Milly! Milly!" called a voice outside; and, before she could answer, an impetuous step was on the stairs, and a girl rushed into the room. It was no other than the sister Beatrice upon whom she had been reflecting. A stranger might have fancied, from her tumultuous entrance, that she came to announce a fire in the house; but Milly knew better, and looked up in no way disturbed.

The sisters were a contrast. Milly was demure and graceful, with the youthful grace of seventeen; her dark brown eyes had rather a pensive expression; and her hair, of a colour somewhat darker than her eyes, was coiled in a becoming fashion round her pretty head. Her muslin dress fell fresh and crisp just as it ought to fall, and her toilette was carefully finished with ribbons, locket, and brooch.

Beatrice, who had plunged into the room as one might go, head first, into the sea from a bathing-machine, was a year older than her sister, but retained the unconscious *gaucherie* of twelve years old. Tall and slender, with a fair, pale face and

dancing grey eyes, she had an air of being full of life to the tips of her fingers.

Her dress was crushed and tumbled, so that it bore no resemblance to its twin, as worn by Milly; her neck-tie had twisted its bow behind her head, and hat and jacket were covered with dust. The plentiful dark hair was not arranged, but disarranged in something which might once have been called plaits; the whole producing a general effect rather whimsical than pleasant.

"Attie! where have you been?" exclaimed her sister.

"Half-way up an organ pipe," returned Beatrice. "I wish you would come into the church, Milly; they are getting on so splendidly; and I've learned all sorts of dodges, and made ever such friends with Mr. Carter, the builder. I could build an organ myself now, I believe, and I mean to have a go at it some of these days. Do come and see."

"I think not," said Milly, with a glance at the two dresses. "It makes you in such a mess, and I shall see it all when it's finished, you know."

"But then you won't know anything about it. I'd no idea myself what a jolly thing an organ was before. Look here, Milly; here's a little model of an organ pipe Mr. Carter gave me—wasn't it nice of him?"

"But it's not a pipe," said Milly, glancing at some mysterious bits of wood which were flourished before her eyes.

"They only want gluing together, like this; now listen;" and, holding her bits of wood tightly, Beatrice blew through them with all her might.

"There! do you hear? That's the note, lower 'D.' And now, listen again; there are the harmonics. Isn't that jolly?"

Both sounds were equally like a miniature bellow to Milly's ear, and she did not wish to pursue the subject of harmonics, for she was aware, from past experience, that Beatrice would immediately dive into "sound waves" in a manner which greatly perplexed Mildred, who was not distinguished by any love of science; so she answered vaguely that it *was* very nice.

"And you won't come," pursued Attie, suddenly throwing down her pipe and turning round. "Then I must be off again, for they are just putting up the thirty-two foot pipe, and I wouldn't miss it for anything."

And off she dashed, banging the door after her in that manner which secures the greatest amount of noise and the least amount of utility, for the door burst open again directly. Milly instantly added in her journal—

"I am sure I should not like to be a Genius," and underlined the sure to make it "doubly sure." Then she rose to shut the door more effectually.

As she did so, something in the garden caught her eye and brought her to the window; her face flushed as she looked.

"Mr. Burton and Marion!" she said to herself. "I thought it must be! And yet it does seem so strange! I don't believe it—I really cannot believe it!"

The cause of her sudden excitement was the apparition, in a very shady part of the garden, of a lady and gentleman talking together in a peculiarly confidential manner. In the lady Mildred recognised her eldest sister, and in the gentleman, a minor canon from a neighbouring cathedral, who was often their guest.

"I told Beatrice," pursued Milly in her own thoughts, "that I was sure Marion and Mr. Burton looked like lovers; and she said she did not believe it, because they did not blush enough. Now I am sure I was right."

Between being sure that she was right, and being quite unable to believe in the strange new event, Mildred was far too much perplexed for more writing, and left the journal alone.

"How odd it would be to have a brother-in-law!" she thought. "I can't fancy what any sort of

brother would be like, unless it was something like Attie; I always think she is a kind of brother. It would be nice to belong to a man somehow, and so new—as we cannot remember papa, and our uncles will always stop in India. I wonder what mamma will say!"

Mildred was not the only person who was occupied with that wonder on this particular afternoon. Nobody was wondering more about it than "mamma" herself. She had expected the disclosure which had just been made for some months, having felt, like Mildred, that "Mr. Burton and Marion looked like lovers." She had even spoken of it with Lily, her second daughter, Marion's pendant in the family; and Lily had been silent, as was her wont, but very sad at the thought of losing the sister who had been a second self to her. For a wonder, Lily's name was suited to her looks; fair and stately, with gentle blue eyes and silent lips, she grew very lily-like in Mrs. Braithwaite's home.

Mrs. Braithwaite herself, a tall, pleasant-faced lady, with something of Beatrice's superabundant life in her, watched her "quiet one" anxiously, wondering what she would do without the sister who seemed always to speak and think for her.

"And yet," said the mother to herself, "there is more thought and strength in Lily really than in

Marion. Perhaps it will do her good to stand alone more."

And now at last the disclosure was made, and Mrs. Braithwaite was wondering what she should say to it. The mother's pang at the thought of parting with her child roused again the widow's pang of loneliness, but she smiled bravely, as was her wont, over all her troubles. So she sat busily working in her drawing-room, feeling as if an earthquake had shaken it, but showing only her usual brisk, alert self.

"May I come in?" said a soft voice at the door; and at the same moment the speaker did come in, without waiting for permission. She was a fine woman, with fair hair and cold blue eyes, fashionably dressed in light and dark greys, with rather a youthful bonnet for her years, whereof she had probably numbered forty-five. Mrs. Braithwaite's plain dress of black silk (its blackness had never varied since her husband's death) looked almost shabby by the newcomer's toilette.

"My dear Marion, say if I interrupted you, and I can come at any other time," was the lady's greeting to Mrs. Braithwaite, who smiled and shook her head.

"Not a bit, Prissie; I was doing nothing but work, and I wanted to see you very much. I have a great piece of news for you."

"News! Good news, I hope."

"That's as folks think; you will call it good, I daresay, for you are always wild about weddings."

"A wedding! One of your girls, of course. Ah! I guess; dear Marion and Mr. Burton!"

"You horrid woman, to take the bread out of my mouth in that way! How did you come to find it out?"

"I am too fond of my nieces not to be alive to everything that concerns their welfare. My dear sister, you must let me congratulate you; and though you have such an aversion to kissing, you positively must let me give you a kiss."

In point of fact, Mrs. Braithwaite and "Prissie," otherwise Mrs. Robarts, were not sisters, Mrs. Robarts being the daughter of Mrs. Braithwaite's stepfather; but, having no more real sisters to claim the title, they had been content to call each other so. They had married young, and had not spent time enough at home together for their very dissimilar characters to jar upon each other, so they had always kept on very loving terms, and on the death of Mr. Robarts, some six years before this time, his widow had brought her children to live near her "sister."

"I am not at all sure that there is anything to congratulate me upon," said Mrs. Braithwaite, submitting to the kiss. "The man came here an hour

ago and asked my leave to speak to Marion, and of course I could not prevent his speaking to her. Since then I have been waiting, wondering when the speaking would be over, and what I should say when my turn comes."

"But, my dear Marion, you must be pleased!" exclaimed Mrs. Robarts, eagerly. "Mr. Burton is such an exceedingly pleasant man, and a perfect gentleman. I have been told the Dean has the highest opinion of him. Besides, it is not as if he had only the minor canonry; his father, Mr. Burton the brewer, must be immensely rich, and this is the only son. I know it was quite a trouble to his father that this young man objected to going into the business—only, luckily, there was an elder sister's son to take his place. The father and son continued on excellent terms, though, and old Mr. Burton is most liberal to him."

"Yes, I suppose there will be no lack of money," returned Mrs. Braithwaite, rather listlessly. "But my girls would have plenty to live upon if they did not marry at all."

"But you do not wish to make vestal virgins of them all, I am sure. Lily is the only one I can fancy likely to submit to that."

"Lily! yes, I think she would be in no hurry to marry. But Marion keeps us together; I really don't

see how we are to get on without Marion. I shall have to give up the situation altogether."

Mrs. Braithwaite was accustomed to speak lightly when she felt deeply, and her friend looked at her, not understanding what she meant.

"Of course dear Marion will be the greatest loss," she murmured softly.

"Loss! I am sure I can't see the good of having children at all, if they are to be carried off in this way."

Mrs. Robarts laughed at the odd, half-petulant manner of this speech; but instantly falling into the gentlest sympathy, she said—

"I understand your feelings only too well. Our children are of course all in all to us, but we can hardly expect to be as much to them;" here she sighed expressively, and rearranged her lace cuffs. "But you are better off than I am; you have four sweet girls, and I but one to help me take care of my dear boy."

"How is Louis to-day?" Mrs. Braithwaite asked suddenly, evidently glad to escape from feelings to facts.

"The warm weather tries him so much. He seems so very weak and languid this afternoon; it is quite sad to see him."

"He wants a tonic again; you should speak to Dr.

Grey about it," said Mrs. Braithwaite; and she threw herself earnestly into a discussion of the health of her friend's invalid son. But presently that lady led back the conversation to Mr. Burton.

"It is so selfish of me to be talking of my Louis when your heart is full of other matters. Do tell me that you are fond of Mr. Burton—that he is one whom you could willingly receive into your family circle."

"Ah! I don't know—yes—I suppose we are all very well disposed to like him. We call him 'The Great Baby' sometimes among ourselves; he is so like a great, large child in his ways."

"Boyish and full of high spirits, I daresay. Well, my dear, I think it is a most delightful and suitable arrangement. But as I am in mortal dread of being found in the way when these lovers come in, I shall run away now. Send somebody down this evening to let me hear the news."

"I daresay some of the girls will run down," returned Mrs. Braithwaite; and they parted.

It was not long before the tall figure of her proposed son-in-law appeared at the drawing-room window, and beside him Marion's plump little form. This eldest daughter was decidedly the plain one of the family, but such good sense and good humour lighted up her round, rosy face, that nobody was inclined to find fault with it.

"May we come in this way?" laughed Marion at the window, which opened door-like upon the garden; "it is such a special occasion." For it was one of the laws of Mrs. Braithwaite that the family should not go in and out by the drawing-room window, and no one ever dreamed of breaking her laws in that house.

"Come in, then," she said; and the pair came in and stood by her. Mr. Burton had a sensible, pleasant face, lighted by the brightest brown eyes in the world; he was over six feet high, and had a general effect of having a greater length of limb than he quite knew what to do with. Mrs. Braithwaite glanced from one to the other, and saw both faces so radiant with happiness that she could not but smile herself.

"Well," she said, "and what have you to say to me?"

"We have to ask you to wish us joy, Mrs. Braithwaite," the gentleman returned, with a very broad smile.

"Only we have got it without wishing," laughed Marion, kissing her mother. "Oh, mother dear! aren't you glad? it is so very nice," she whispered, with her arms round her neck; and more embracing followed, in the midst of which Beatrice burst into the room with her usual abruptness. She generally ran about as though invisible spirits were propelling her from behind.

"What *is* the matter?" she exclaimed, pausing in the middle of the floor. "What is everybody kissing everybody about?"

"Ah! what indeed!" laughed Marion, raising her glittering eyes. "Take care, Attie, or you will come in for some of the kissing too."

"No; but *what* is it?" repeated Beatrice, impatiently.

"Spare our rosy blushes," said Mr. Burton. "Can't you guess?"

Then Beatrice did guess, and blushed most intensely herself.

"Ah! how funny!" was all she said; and it did not much matter what anybody said at the moment, for they were too much excited to be eloquent themselves, or to listen to anybody else. There was a confusion of talking all the time; but nobody recollected what had been said afterwards—which was, perhaps, no great loss.

Meanwhile, Milly had grown weary of sitting by herself trying to realise the new event, and had ventured to make a visit to Lily's room to get some help in making up her mind about the matter. She found Lily sitting, looking lost in thought, gazing out of the window, with a sad, resolved look pinching her lips. She looked up at her sister with a determined effort at a smile.

"Lily," said Mildred, softly, "is it true about Marion and Mr. Burton?"

"I believe it is," said Lily.

"And do you like it, dear?" pursued Mildred, getting closer to her sister.

"I should hope so," cried Lily, valiantly, conveying to the mind of her listener that the not liking it would be a very grave offence against good taste.

"Oh! of course it is very nice—very nice indeed!" cried Milly, catching the notion at once. "I am sure I shall be so glad, and everybody will be so glad too."

"I should hope so," repeated Lily in the same half-defiant tone.

"Only," Mildred suggested, "I can't think how we are to get on without Marion; though perhaps it would be the same with anybody. We should not know how to get on without you or Beatrice."

"Oh! that would be quite different, because you would have Marion to make everything right, as she always does. Of course we can't expect things to go smoothly without her; but it does not matter, they must go roughly;" and there was a little more defiance in the tone, as if she were challenging fate.

"Oh! of course—of course," said Mildred. "I think I shall go down and see if anything is going on."

"Yes, do," said Lily, who desired to be left with

her own thoughts; and Mildred rather timidly made her way to the drawing-room window and peeped in. The sight of Beatrice gave her courage to join the group, and she also broke the law, and entered by the window.

"Well, Milly," cried Marion, "have you come to congratulate me too?" and the sisters embraced after the fashion of girls.

"I am so very glad," cried Mildred. "It is the very nicest thing I ever heard of;" and she felt as she said.

Mr. Burton laughed, and they all laughed, while Mrs. Braithwaite asked if she had given them her blessing in a proper and correct way, and if she might go upstairs and dress for tea? This broke up the party, and the lovers strolled out again into the garden. Beatrice and Mildred followed their mother.

"You like it, mother dear?" whispered Milly.

"Not much; we could have got on very well as we were, if that man would have let us alone."

"But it *is* jolly, mother!" exclaimed Beatrice, with her usual schoolboyishness of expression. "Anyone can see they just suit each other. And how happy Marion looks."

"So does he," said Mildred.

"And so he ought," said her sister, conclusively.

The whole party met again at the tea-table, tea taking the place of late dinner in that feminine

household. Marion, usually so active in dispensing bread and other necessaries to her family, was now found so unequal to the occasion that Beatrice took her place.

"Let me come, Marion," she said. "It is like putting into a lottery to ask you for anything; one never knows what one may get."

Marion laughed, and went to sit by "Henry," as she now publicly said, thus causing a great sensation among her sisters. But she made no effort to keep her employment, and relapsed into absence of mind in the most ridiculously commonplace manner. The family, accustomed to sit at the feet of their respected elder sister and profit by her good sense, suddenly saw the oracle transformed entirely.

"Certainly," Beatrice said to Mildred afterwards, "love is a great leveller. There's Marion just as stupid as any girl in a novel now, and her sense is of no use."

"Perhaps it will come back again by-and-by," said Milly, who always took hopeful views.

"I wish now they would make haste and get married, and see if that would make her her proper self again," said Attie.

Certainly that tea was not a brilliant affair; two of the company being in Paradise, two in confusion of mind, and two deeply and secretly distressed at

feeling a great treasure slipping away from them. Mr. Burton would try and talk to Mrs. Braithwaite on ordinary topics, but he did not in the least know what he was saying; Beatrice was inclined to laugh at him, which pleased him very much, and made him laugh too, in a somewhat undignified way; and, whenever he laughed, Marion laughed also, quite independently of any idea of a joke. Altogether, it was a relief when the tea was ended, and the party allowed to disperse.

"Now let us run down and tell Mrs. Robarts," exclaimed Beatrice. Lily winced a little at the proposition, but Mildred was quite ready; and the two sisters were soon out in the dewy summer's evening. The neighbouring Cathedral of Middleborough looked purple in the sunset, and their village, Midthorpe, though it lay in the English lowlands, was too well wooded not to look fair in the glowing light.

"How lovely those lights are on the Cathedral tower!" exclaimed Beatrice. "If we could only catch them in a picture; but they would be sure to look too violent."

"It would be like a story with only happy people in it," said Milly, "and not be at all touching,"

"Then I should like it all the better," returned Beatrice; "happy people are much the most interest-

ing. I think when people begin to cry they are always enough to frighten you away."

"Oh, Attie! think of the Bride of Lammermoor, and Romeo and Juliet, and Enoch Arden! Are they not much nicer than people who are always happy?"

"After such an array of quotations as that, I really have nothing to say," laughed Beatrice; "except that I stick to my sentiment, and like a whole china cup better than a cracked one."

"Is Louis a cracked china cup? Aren't you fond of him, Attie?"

"Louis! Well, of course he is one's cousin, and something like a brother, and one would naturally be fond of him, cracked or whole. Besides, he is so clever, and has such deep thoughts, he's always delicious to talk to. But fancy him strong and well, been to Eton and just going to Cambridge—of course he'd be twenty times as nice."

"I don't think so; he wouldn't be *he*, you know; his mind has been in a sort of hothouse with being shut up. If he had been one of these stupid, strong creatures going to athletic sports, he would not have thought those deep thoughts."

"Yes, he would, and they would have been more practical, and not so morbid. You must own Louis is very morbid, Milly."

"I never know what people mean by morbid. But

"THE END OF THEIR WALK WAS A PRETTY GARDEN."

he is often cross, no doubt; and he would not have been so, perhaps, if he could have gone about like other people. So I daresay you are right, Attie."

Beatrice clapped her hands together with a gesture of vexation. "Milly!" she exclaimed, "what is the good of arguing with you if you don't stick to your own opinions after all?"

"But if you seem to be in the right, how can I?"

"How can you? Why, by thinking of something that seems to you more right. But arguing with you is just like pulling at a stick that a person lets go, and down you fall."

"At any rate we need not argue any more now, Attie, for we are at the end of our walk."

The end of their walk was a pretty garden, surrounding a rather affected-looking house, built after the model of a Swiss chalet, with variations. One of these variations was a large bow window, which was now open, disclosing the long, thin figure and pale face of the invalid Louis, to whom they began to speak both at once from the outside.

## CHAP. II.—RATHER ALARMING.

LOUIS ROBARTS had, as Mildred truly said, some resemblance to a hothouse flower; not, however, to a delicate exotic which could not flourish out of doors, and owed its frail loveliness to artificial heat. He was rather a plant which might have grown well in storm or sunshine, and been the hardier for the winter's frost, but which had been forced into an unnatural growth by the uncongenial warmth. Kept a prisoner, lying on a sofa since he was eight years old, he was rather oppressed than animated by the fresh, vivid sense of life which throbbed within him. His thoughts worked with a sort of devouring eagerness that was almost painful, and he studied with an industry that can only be described as fierce.

He was not altogether a pleasant person, but deserved great "allowances," as people say, since he lived under such painful pressure. His nature had never shrunk, as many natures will, to the smallness of what he could possess, and so become meanly con-

tent; nor while yearning, with its keenest wants gasping "as a thirsty land," had his heart learned to be satisfied in dissatisfaction, and so become grandly content. There was, in fact, a good deal of mischief going on within him as he worked and thought, but he was not hopeless. The doctor had told him that he "would grow out of his weakness," and his mind was often filled with grand visions of what he would do in the world when that glorious time of strength should come. Now he was nearly twenty, and six feet high; but he had not grown into strength yet.

It was a weakness of the spine to which the doctors referred; there was another malady afflicting him which they had never discovered. Like Hans Andersen's Princess, he had the misfortune of seeing too clearly; and that, as Andersen justly observes, is a very bad symptom indeed.

"Now, Louis, do say you are surprised," pleaded Milly, when their news was told.

"Why should I be surprised?" returned the invalid, with a half smile which hardly lighted his great grey eyes and sensitive mouth. "Do not people get married every day? and have not my mother and Prissie been talking of nothing but this the last six months?"

"At any rate, you must wish them joy," said Milly.

"They won't have any more for my wishing it," returned the boy ungraciously.

"They would have the joy of knowing you wished it them," suggested Beatrice.

Reply was prevented by someone opening the door rather hastily in the darker background of the room, which someone stumbled over a stool, upset a chair, and made a great confusion in advancing.

"Prissie! look out, can't you?" cried Louis angrily; "why can't you look where you're going to?"

"Are Attie and Milly there?" cried the said Prissie. "Oh! do wait a minute for me to congratulate you;" and herewith a large, red-haired girl tumbled to the window. One glance, even in the twilight, showed that Priscilla Robarts was decidedly plain; a closer inspection was required to find sense and feeling in her face.

"Do let it alone," said Louis, "and talk about something else if you can." But he was not gratified, for Mrs. Robarts swept down the lawn with silken rustling, and softly kissed the girls and whispered her heartfelt good wishes in the most touching way. Never was anything more gracefully appropriate than her words and gestures; but they had no soothing effect on Louis, who looked even crosser than before.

"I think we must run home now," suggested Milly, looking timidly at the invalid; and good nights

were exchanged, not very cordially on Louis's part. Then the sisters turned towards the gate, followed by Prissie, who ran out after them. "I am so glad," she whispered, hugging Milly vehemently; "it is so nice. Do give my love to Marion; won't you, dear, darling, dearest Milly?"

And Mildred was hugged and embraced again. Prissie was two years younger than this cousin of hers, and their friendship was almost worship on one side.

"It is so nice," pursued the excitable young lady; "and only fancy how pleased Mr. Burton must be at being your brother, you dear, darling duck of a Milly!"

Here the embraces recommenced with all the former vehemence, and Mildred's hat was just falling a victim to the ardour of friendship, when the sound of hasty footsteps startled the girls.

It appeared that they were not the only startled people, for the new-comer stopped short at the sight of them, and seemed to have no courage to advance. He was an awkward, bony man, who held down his head in an uncomfortable way, and could no more look at them than at the sun.

Of course they were ominously quiet in a moment, glanced at him, and moved away from the gate. This emboldened him so far that he came into the garden and went up to the house.

"Who is it?" Beatrice asked, when he had gone by.

"It must be Mr. Oakley, the new second master of the Grammar School; mamma asked him to call to talk about tutorising Louis," said Prissie.

"Then we have cheated Louis of his useful knowledge," Beatrice returned. "I am sure the poor man will never dare come near the place again; your gushing, Prissie, frightened him too much."

The girls laughed, and their laughter reached the poor man as he pulled the door-bell. It seemed to him that they must be laughing at him, and he crimsoned furiously.

"Why is he to teach Louis?" Milly asked. "I should think no one but old Dr. Bird was clever enough for that."

"Dr. Bird says it is too much for him now; that's what makes Louis so cross to-night. But I think he ought not to be, for the doctor wrote mamma such a nice letter about it, saying how sorry he was to give Louis up. 'It has been,' he says, 'one of the greatest pleasures of my life to be allowed to have my share in training such a mind. Should his health be restored, your son may take his place amongst men who are the pride of England.' Isn't Dr. Bird a darling for saying so?"

"And was Louis pleased?" asked Beatrice.

"No, he seemed more unhappy than before."

"Of course, because of the 'if,'" said Milly softly.

"Yes, 'if' is a ghost nobody can lay," said Beatrice.

"But I hope this Mr. Oakley is a great swell, to be good enough for Louis."

"He is very clever, and was tenth wrangler—a better master than they have ever had at the Grammar School, Dr. Bird says."

The sisters here recollected that it was growing very late, and abruptly departed, Beatrice dragging Mildred away out of some more of Prissie's embraces.

Meanwhile, poor Mr. Oakley, feeling extremely disconcerted, had been ushered into Mrs. Robarts' drawing-room, where he waited for a few moments. The servant placed a shaded lamp on the table, and somehow the little prettinesses of the room, filled with the soft fragrance of summer flowers, did not soothe him. On the contrary, he was so unaccustomed to the mute evidences of a lady's presence that he felt more out of countenance as he noted them; indeed he had half a mind to escape into the garden, when a silk dress rustled in the passage, and the door opened, disclosing the graceful form of Mrs. Robarts. She advanced in a most friendly manner.

"This is so good of you, Mr. Oakley; I have been so anxious to see you again, to thank you for letting Dr. Bird make us known to each other, and it is most kind of you to come so far."

fulness and composure; she seemed more unreal than anyone to her daughters. They had never seen her but in black before, and now she appeared in pearl-grey silk, with a white lace shawl.

"It really can't be mother," said Beatrice to herself.

At last the bride was ready, and the time came for them to start. A pompous old cousin took Marion on his arm, for it was his part to give her away.

"Giving away what never belonged to him," said Attie.

Mrs. Braithwaite's garden had a side entrance which opened into the churchyard: this gate was now thrown open, and a fine red carpet covered all the pathway from the house to the church porch. Down this gay road the little bridal procession took its way: the veiled bride on her cousin's arm; Lily, in her pink and white, paired with a younger cousin; then Beatrice, Mildred, and Prissie, similarly attended; afterwards Mrs. Robarts with Mr. Burton, and Mrs. Burton with Sir Arthur Marston, and sundry other friends and neighbours. As for Mrs. Braithwaite, she declined going to church, but stood out upon the lawn watching their departure. At the church porch the bridesmaids' attendant cousins retired, and the maids walked in due order behind the bride to the altar, where the bridegroom and two attendant younger cousins of his own awaited them.

It was a very cheerful wedding; no one crying but Mildred, who wore a very April face, and Mrs. Robarts, who dropped a tear or two as gracefully as she did everything else.

It was over before Beatrice could rouse herself from her dreamy state: the sound of the new organ burst on in the march from "Scipio;" that was the first thing that appeared decidedly real to her. Then there was some signing and kissing in the vestry, and presently they were outside, with the sun blazing down on the red carpet, the school children scattering flowers, the grand chords of the march dying away behind them, and Marion was Mrs. Burton, walking with her husband.

"It is beautiful!" murmured Milly to her sister; "I wish poor Louis could have seen it all."

"I dare say he is glad enough to be out of it," returned Attie.

This, perhaps, was true; and yet Louis was feeling irritated at his imprisonment, while the rest of the world was so busy. One good thing was, that it was a Wednesday afternoon, and Mr. Oakley would be coming by-and-by; for Louis and his tutor had become fast friends.

Meanwhile he would amuse himself with an unread number of his favourite magazine. He plunged into it, and had completely lost himself in some very un-

comfortable speculations before Mr. Oakley presented himself.

"There's a capital paper!" said Louis, as they greeted each other.

"What is it? Do you know, I generally dislike magazines and mincemeat; I like to chew my own food." Mr. Oakley at his ease was upright and pleasant to look upon; generally with a look of serious patience on his face, but with a peculiarly brilliant smile flashing out now and then. His voice was low, yet cordial and cheery, and Louis usually revived at the first sound of it; but to-day the feeling of irritation was too strong upon him to be easily banished.

"Have you seen it?" he asked drily, as Mr. Oakley looked at the paper.

"That article? Yes; it was noticed in the papers, and I read it at the beginning of the month."

"It's very clever, isn't it?"

"Very ingenious; but not an ingenuity that I care for. False reasoning on false premises is vexation to my logical mind."

"False reasoning, you call it! I don't. But as to the premises, he's reasoning about religion, and there are no certainly defined premises for him to go upon. It's not like a mathematical problem, where you're sure a triangle is a triangle to begin with, you know."

"No; there are historical facts, not mathematical facts, to argue about; but I can hardly call this steeple-chase writing argument. He begins by assuming that the greatest phenomena of the world's history are nothing at all; then he leaps over all causes into an existing state of things, of which he seems to me to take a strangely confused view, and then he begins to reason. My reason would be quite lamed after such athletic sports: it cannot follow him at all."

"How would you begin to argue upon such a thing as our received views of religion?"

"If I wished to prove that they were false, I should have to account for their existence, and trace the origin of such a falsity. To ascribe their origin to man's mental necessities is an argument on the other side of the question; for a real necessity certainly implies as possible a real satisfaction. But, not to pursue this immense subject any further just now, let me give you one word of warning, Louis. Christianity is a fact, the majesty of which you will learn better from the great experiences of life than from any mental acuteness. Meanwhile be patient, and leave doubtful literature alone."

"Thanks; but I like not to shrink from both sides of a question."

"That is well, within all limits of scientific enquiry; but the question of religion cannot be subjected to

the same tests. While we are children, and liable to be 'carried about by every blast of vain doctrine,' we shall do wisely to avoid those blasts. The time in which you could investigate these matters safely has not yet come to you: your youth prevents it."

Louis disdainfully turned away his head.

"Don't be vexed with me if I remind you that faith is not a mere mental effort, but a virtue, and delicate as other virtues. You should no more risk it by studying these infidel crudities, than you should endanger purity of mind by studying profligate writings."

"Cant!" exclaimed Louis, rudely. "I wish you were not a clergyman, Mr. Oakley; then, at any rate, you would have no solid motives for such warnings. At present, allow me to suggest that we turn to the mathematics."

Mr. Oakley's manner changed in a moment: he drew himself up with the look of imperious haughtiness which had startled Mrs. Robarts; the next moment the cloud was on him again; he bent his head over his papers, and said in a changed voice—

"Yes; we had better work."

Louis was too much annoyed to work well that afternoon: he was listless and distracted. Mr. Oakley explained and taught with rather dogged patience; and both were relieved when five o'clock struck.

Then the pupil was meditating some conciliatory speech; but his hand was gravely shaken, and his tutor walked away before he had found words.

"He must think me a cub," said Louis penitently to himself.

But Mr. Oakley's thoughts were of a different kind: he was more occupied with his own misdeeds than with Louis's offences.

"A fine Christian I am to teach the poor boy the good of Christianity!" he told himself; "not able even to keep my own temper! Shall I never learn humility?"

And when he reached his home, a pleasant little house under the shadow of the Cathedral, he went to his room to pray, not only for his pupil, but also for himself.

Louis was so ill at ease that solitude was very wearisome; and it was specially pleasant, just after Mr. Oakley had left him, to see Milly tripping down the garden path towards him. She had taken off the bridesmaid's pink and white, but she looked just as fresh and pretty in her light flowing muslin and shady hat.

"Well, Louis, I thought I would be the first to tell you all about it, so as soon as people went away I made haste to run down here."

"You are always so good to me, Milly," he said, taking her hand, and looking up into her face with a gentler look than usual in those great, hungry eyes. Milly blushed with pleasure; Louis was usually too brotherlike for civil speeches, and she was astonished as well as delighted.

"Dear Louis! you know how I like to come. Shall I tell you all about the wedding?"

"Do, Milly; talk away to me; there's something I want to put out of my head."

Thus encouraged, Milly related all—spared him neither orange flowers nor dresses, Marion's veil or mother's grey silk.

"And then, Louis, after service came the breakfast, of course, and that was rather dreadful, because of the speeches. Henry—we must call him Henry now, you know—was so confused over his, poor fellow! and so were the others, except Sir Arthur, who made such a nice tidy little speech, proposing Mr. Burton's health."

"I don't see what he had to do with it," said Louis, rather discontentedly.

"Oh! they gave it him because they knew he would do it so well. He's just one of those nicely clever people, you know. There are some clever people not so pleasant, who can do everything except just what you want them to do. But he is exactly

what I call nicely clever, doing just what is wanted at the right moment."

"Attie told me he was an affected prig, and she did not believe he was clever at all."

"Oh, well, perhaps," said the yielding Milly, "I don't know much about cleverness, Louis; you know best, of course. I am one of the stupid ones. Perhaps a person need not be really very clever to seem very clever to me."

"What does it matter about girls being clever? You are a great deal better as you are, Milly." And the little lady coloured again with satisfaction at finding herself in such favour that afternoon. Both seemed a little disturbed when a small pony-carriage, driven by Beatrice, appeared at the garden gate.

"Does Attie want to carry you off?" asked Louis.

"Oh, I am afraid she does. I quite forgot that we agreed to drive to the town-post with the wedding cards, so as to send them off to-night. I am very sorry if you want me."

"Not at all!" He hesitated a moment, and then said, "Should you mind leaving a note for Mr. Oakley? To tell you a secret, Milly; I was as spiteful as could be to-day, and I'm afraid I put him out."

"Why, Dr. Bird said he was the most wonderfully patient teacher, nothing ever put him out of temper."

"Well, if he doesn't fire off, it's not for want of

gunpowder; I'll say that for him. But can you wait for my note? I shall not be a minute."

Milly ran out to tell her sister that she must stop a little while, and Louis hastily wrote a few lines.

"DEAR MR. OAKLEY,—I am so vexed at the remembrance of my incivility to-day; but it was too hot for exciting arguments. I am quite sure that you hate cant as much as I do, and that you only gave the advice which you feel bound in honour to give your pupils. Forget my nonsense.—Yours,

"L. R."

With this missive the sisters started for Middleborough, chattering away about the events of the day.

"Let us give Louis's note first," said Milly, as they drove into the town.

"Your notion of duty," said Beatrice; "Louis first and everything else afterwards." They came into the Cathedral precincts, and stopped at Mr. Oakley's door, rather to the disconcerting of that gentleman, who perceived them from the window.

"Nothing will bring him to the door himself," whispered Attie; "I am sure he is terrified at us."

So it appeared at first, and the note was given to a servant, with instructions to ask for an answer; but after a minute or two's waiting, the door opened again, and disclosed poor Mr. Oakley, more confused, more

awkward than ever, impelled by civility to give his message in person.

"There is no answer, thank you," he brought out with some difficulty, and with eyes intently fixed on the carriage wheels. "That is, I will not trouble you with a note; I shall see him—Mr. Robarts—soon."

Then he tried to look at Beatrice, and bow; but the look was quite a failure, and the bow very oddly performed; and Mr. Oakley, overwhelmed with a sense of his own deficiencies, was left, colouring crimson, on his doorstep.

"Knowing how harmless we are," remarked Attie, as they drove away, "I cannot imagine how anybody can be so frightened at us as that poor man seems to be."

"Daddy long-legs are harmless, I suppose; but they always make me scream," said Milly. "No doubt we are Mr. Oakley's daddy long-legs."

"Don't be too humble, Milly; it's a great mistake; you have to work so hard at showing you don't mean what you say, for fear people should believe you."

Then they had to devote all their attention to the post-office; an effort they greatly enjoyed.

"Let us go and tell Louis we gave his note," said Milly, as they returned; and they sent their little carriage home with their servant, while they went back to their cousin. He was lying just as they had

left him; an open book in his hand, but with his eyes looking far away.

"We gave your note," said the girls, "and he was grateful;" and they sat down for a few minutes' more chat.

"Though we must not stay long, or we shall be caught by the beggar again," said Attie.

"Pray don't, for you'll never get such another Paladin," returned Louis.

"I hope not," said Attie; "it would make a rule of three sum: if one rescuer is worse than two beggars, how bad would two rescuers be?"

Louis laughed, and appeared to have such pleasure in the disparagement of the "Paladin," that Milly forbore to reproach her sister with ingratitude.

At the moment their conversation was interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps, and Louis looked out.

"Who is it?" asked the girls together, for they were below the window, Milly on a stool, and Attie, in a favourite Turkish attitude she had, upon the ground.

Before Louis could answer, someone was standing at the window, and they heard Mr. Oakley's voice; happily he did not see them in their humble positions behind the sofa, and so was spared a shock to his nerves.

MILLY, ATTÏE, AND LOUIS.

"I've only come to thank you for your note," he said, in a pleasant and cordial way. "It was very good of you to write, and I'm much obliged. But you're mistaken about one thing, Robarts: I don't say anything because I feel bound in honour to say it to my pupils. I'm only bound in honour to speak the truth to them as well as to every one else. However, I'm much obliged all the same, and sorry you troubled yourself. Good night, my dear fellow," and he shook hands with Louis and departed.

"Short and sweet," said the young man, laughing, and evidently pleased.

"So that's what he's like when you get him at his ease!" exclaimed Attie. "I never should have guessed him like that."

"No; he doesn't show his tricks to the ladies; but he's an uncommonly decent sort of fellow," said Louis; and his cousins knew that the apparently moderate praise meant a good deal.

"Now we must run away too," suggested Milly; and they were soon hurrying home through the sweet evening air.

"And the wedding day is over," sighed Attie. "Now I know what the fire feels like when it has burned down to white ashes."

## CHAP. IV.—UNREAL REALITY.

LOUIS ROBARTS, as we have seen, was not by any means an irreproachable person; he had many little weaknesses, but perhaps the most noticeable of them was that lack of good temper which distorts so many characters. He, perhaps, had more excuses for his tiresome moods than many of us; still it was sometimes awkward for his friends to behold the extent to which he let his "angry passions rise."

"Oh, Milly! dearest, darling Milly!" exclaimed Prissie Robarts, running to meet her cousin at the garden gate—"I am so glad to see you; and if anybody can coax Louis out of his crossness, it is sure to be you."

"Is anything the matter with Louis?" asked Milly, anxiously.

"Not much, I hope; but mamma asked Sir Arthur Marston to lunch, and then brought him in to see Louis; and you know Louis never fancied him, and was so cross!"

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Milly, in great consternation; "and Sir Arthur would be so polite, and that always makes Louis worse."

Prissie shook her red locks sadly.

"Everything makes him worse when he's bad," she said. "But you; do come into the study now and see what you can do."

They found Louis lying on his sofa by the window, as usual, and Mrs. Robarts standing near the table showing photographs to Sir Arthur Marston. She was evidently in one of her most silken moods, contrasting strangely with Louis's rough state of mind.

"Dearest child," was her greeting to Milly as the girls came in, "how pleased I am to see you this afternoon! My dear boy is a little out of spirits, but you will cheer him up."

Milly glanced apprehensively at Louis, who looked very ill-tempered indeed, with his dark hair falling over his forehead in what she knew was a most unpromising fashion. When Louis meant to be good he always tossed it back.

"It is sadly trying for an invalid, this hot weather," said the mother, as she put back her son's curls with a graceful sweep of her hand.

Something in the action irritated the boy; it might be the little look of satisfaction at her own white fingers, or the dreadful clearness of sight on his part

showing him more than that; but certainly his face grew darker, and he shook back his black mane into its former disorder.

"You naughty boy!" laughed his mother; "you will not let me make you tidy;" and she kissed him.

Louis gave anything but an amiable glance in return for the caress, and Mrs. Robarts turned again to Sir Arthur Marston, who was talking to Mildred. "I have not shown you this photograph, I think," she said; "indeed I am sure, for I saved it till the last, that your last impression should be the pleasantest; not only for that reason either, but because it is such a pleasure to me to show it that I saved it up for my own *bonne bouche*."

It was a photograph of Louis and Prissie, looking at each other as certainly they were not in the habit of looking.

"Is it not charming?" cried the enthusiastic mother. "I look at that photograph, I should think, twenty times a-day, and it always charms me afresh. But how foolish I am in demanding your approval of it! You cannot see it with a mother's eye."

"It is very good indeed, extremely so," said Sir Arthur.

"I *love* that photograph, Sir Arthur," said Mrs. Robarts, softly, with a tender emphasis.

"It is not to be wondered at," returned the gentle-

man, with his favourite little bow of congratulation, while Louis turned away his head with weary impatience. Milly bent over him and looked into his eyes, which won a smile and one whispered word, namely, "Croquet."

Milly understood the desire to clear the room, but how could she interrupt the conversation to propose anything?

"Do you think it is a good afternoon for it?" she answered, softly.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Robarts. "Did you wish for anything, my dearest boy?"

"I was only suggesting croquet," he returned.

"Ah! and then you can watch us from the window. This is a sadly spoilt son, Sir Arthur; I think his mother has studied the art of croquet solely to give him something to look at from his window."

Sir Arthur appeared politely to congratulate Mrs. Robarts on spoiling her son.

"Shall we play a game, then? It is proposed by one whose word is law, I am afraid."

"Pray do not play on my account," put in Louis, perversely. "I really can hardly see the lawn from my window."

But they were already on their way to the door, and his mother, bidding him a tender farewell, sailed blandly away. He remained to soliloquise, Hamlet-

like; and like that unhappy prince, too, he made some undutiful reflections upon his mother.

"Scenes! fine scenes!" he sneered to himself. "Why are not people obliged to put their meanings into plain words? These sweet speeches translated would be, 'See, Sir Arthur, what a tender mother I am! How I love my children, and how gracefully I show my affection!' And why? Must everybody's feelings have a mixture of affectation? Would nobody indulge in fine sentiment without an audience? Or are all fine feelings only a sort of fashion, a garment thrown over selfishness that it would be indecent to show? Oh! if it could only be thrown off, all this propriety, and we could be seen ever so repulsive, but only *real!*"

The door opened before he had nearly reached the end of this comfortable train of thought—opened a good deal more abruptly than anybody but Attie would require, and that impulsive young lady burst in.

"All alone, Louis? That's right; I want to get hold of you for a little bit."

"Hold me as tight as you like, I don't mind you, Attie."

"That's liberal. Pray, am I a great exception?"

"I was wondering whether anybody was real throughout—feelings, expressions, and all—when in

you came bouncing, Attie, a live specimen of just what I wanted."

"You have Prissie; I should think she was specimen enough of that kind, if you are making any museum arrangements of *real* people."

"Prissie! She's always exaggerating with her school-girl devotion to her friends. Not that she knows it."

"And Milly; I'm sure she's real enough."

"Poor little dear!" and Louis's voice softened. "She means to be; but she has an echo in her mind, and can't help repeating the last word she hears."

"Oh! that's all her kindness, because she is afraid of hurting anybody's feelings; she goes back to her original views afterwards."

"Fancy Milly with original views!" and they both laughed.

"I wish she would insist upon something sometimes, though," Attie went on, looking serious again. "People might not understand her, and might take her agreements for so much more than they mean, you know."

"How?" Louis asked, with a sudden frown.

"Well, you know how hard people are upon girls sometimes, always saying they are flirting if they talk in a pleasant way to anything in a coat. Nobody has said such things of us, to be sure; because Marion

always talked on so to everybody that no one knew to whom she was talking in particular; and Lily talks to nobody; and as for me, nobody talks to me. But Milly is different; she is too shy to talk to the world in general like Marion, and not shy enough to be quiet altogether like Lily; she would be pleasant to anyone in particular who liked to talk to her, just in the goodness of her heart, and because she can't snub anybody. That's why I am afraid of her being mistaken and called a flirt."

Louis looked extremely savage.

"You are thinking about that intolerable prig out there," he said. "Ever since the wedding he seems to have been perpetually at your house."

"We certainly have been heavily afflicted with him the last two months," said Attie; "but happily October is coming on, and I have been told the delicate plant cannot winter in England. He's so old, too."

"Stupid bore!" muttered Louis.

"Very stupid; and that sort of well-informed stupid which is so very especially aggravating."

Louis wriggled himself into a very odd position to get a sight of the croquet-lawn, and, perceiving Milly and Sir Arthur standing a little apart from the rest talking, the young man looked crosser, and wriggled himself back again.

"But all this time, Louis, instead of gossiping about

my sister, I meant to have got hold of you about some mathematics," pursued Beatrice, with her usual abruptness.

"Fire away," he returned, in rather an absent tone.

At which elegant exhortation she drew out a pocket-book, a pencil, and some papers from her pocket (which appeared to be very elastic), and, dropping her purse, her handkerchief, and one or two more trifles upon the floor, plunged into a problem head-foremost. She had rattled through her statement, her demonstration (which she perceived was wrong), and her difficulty in getting it right, without a pause, in one or two enormous polysyllables; then waited to hear what Louis would say. But he said nothing.

She glanced at him: there he lay, with his head leaning on his hand, his hair straying into his eyes, and a generally distracted and absent look.

"Well, Louis?"

"Well, Attie?"

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Not a word."

Attie laughed very good-humouredly.

"What a tiresome boy you are, Louis! What's the good of my wasting all that fine reasoning? Will you listen to me if I tell you again?"

"Oakley will be here in a few minutes; you can

ask him, can't you?" he returned wearily, and then fell back into his reverie.

"All right; but Mr. Oakley will wish me at the bottom of the sea," responded Beatrice, quite cheerfully; and then she went off into her problem again on her own account, leaving her cousin unmolested.

Silence reigned until the tutor's step outside disturbed them.

"Don't go, Attie," said Louis. "He'll tell you all about it if you don't frighten him too much."

But it appeared, from the start the poor man gave when he did not find his pupil alone, that Attie *did* frighten him very much indeed.

"You are invaded, you see," laughed Louis. "Here is a new pupil for you, Mr. Oakley."

The tutor expressed no pleasure—perhaps because he felt none—but looked very expressively at the chair he usually occupied, as if he would not sit down till the lady had left them.

Louis, however, pulled it forward, saying—

"Do sit down. If you help her a little, you'll find you've made a change for the better. She would learn twice as fast as I can; and I am extra stupid to-day."

Mr. Oakley said he was sorry to hear it, and then perforce turned towards Beatrice, but did not look at her, as he asked what he could do to help her.

"Here's a horrid problem," returned the young

lady. "I can't work it out properly; and when I told Louis all my difficulties, he paid no attention. Do tell me how to find my way through it."

Beatrice had a wonderful singleness of purpose, which fostered that "reality" of character upon which Louis had complimented her. She was thinking of nothing but the mathematics just now. Mr. Oakley's embarrassment passed quite unheeded; she was thinking neither of himself nor of herself.

"Look here," she pursued, and went through her demonstrations with her former rapidity.

Mr. Oakley half-smiled at the eager, girlish tones, and those wonderful polysyllables into which she divided her sentences.

"There," she said, pausing for breath. "I know I must have made some stupid mistake. It's all wrong, isn't it? But I can't find out how."

Attie's elbow was on the table, and her head on her hand, and her grey eyes fixed intently on Mr. Oakley's face; but obviously it was not interesting her at the moment.

He looked down at the papers, and the half-smile became a whole one.

"No, it's not all wrong exactly," he said, after a moment's thought. "It would have been all right if you had not made a mistake at the very beginning."

"But that makes it all wrong."

"Your conclusions are wrong, of course; but your manner of arriving at them is praiseworthy—is, in a certain sense, right."

The frankness was contagious; he spoke almost as freely as if she had been one of his boys.

"Do show me my mistake," she begged.

"With great pleasure;" and with unaverted eyes he set forth to her what she ought to have found out, at the same time comforting her with the assurance that the question was a very difficult one.

Louis leant back, and lost himself again in some gloomy train of thought (to judge by his face), while Mr. Oakley made his explanation with clearness and quietness very pleasant to hear, Attie decided. The slow, patient way in which proof was built on proof delighted her, and her bright eyes were fixed upon his face with an eagerness that suggested an immediate intention of jumping down his throat.

"Do you see it now?" he asked, when he had finished.

"Not quite clearly; it is more like a little white thing running away through the trees," she said.

Mr. Oakley stared at her in undisguised astonishment, the comparison seemed to him so incomprehensible.

"But I shall puzzle it out for myself. You have shown me the way, and I am much obliged to you."

"What way have I shown you?" he asked, smiling again, for he rather doubted her comprehension now.

Beatrice shut her eyes for a moment, and then explained in her turn.

"Capital," said Mr. Oakley; "you are quite right. It is a pity you are not a boy, Miss Braithwaite;" and he sighed at the waste of good gifts of mathematics upon a female.

"I see it more plainly now," she returned; "it seems to be coming nearer through the trees."

"Ah! if you were a boy you would not make these comparisons," he remarked, rather as if he were thinking aloud; and then, a sudden sense of her sex rushing over him, he again relapsed into awkwardness, with his eyes fixed on the floor.

"You must have your turn now, Louis," said Attie. "Thank you so very much, Mr. Oakley;" and she shook hands with him, and left him in a state of some consternation.

What a lovely autumn day it was outside! The wind moved the leaves so gently, even the horse-chestnut leaves that were getting brown did not shudder, or make any of the ghostly rustlings that are heard at the dying time of the year. Was the time really coming when they would flutter helplessly, wildly, in that same wind, and whirl in a

dance of death? It did not seem likely just then, under the sunshine, with the air as gentle as a summer breeze. Autumn need not be all forebodings, and fears, and brightness fading, after all.

Mrs. Robarts may have felt some message in the day; she stood so gracefully on the croquet ground, she grouped herself near Milly, she seemed to show that autumn can be as beautiful as spring. She made a third several times when Sir Arthur and Mildred stood together; and it appeared as if she approved of those *tête-à-têtes* as little as Louis.

The game was not a very merry one, for the gentleman she was entertaining was not a promoter of merriment—not, indeed, understanding it.

But it was played through with a grave attention on the part of the players, promoted by the polite carefulness which characterised all Sir Arthur's strokes. He appeared to be never less at play than when at play.

"It is so nice of him to be always serious," said Milly to her sister afterwards, when they talked over their afternoon. "I daresay it is ever since the death of the lady he was going to marry. I cannot fancy his laughing heartily; can you?"

"I can't fancy his seeing anything to laugh at," returned Attie, in her decisive manner. "He'd be like a hearse-horse at a circus, I should think."

"It is nice to have some people grave," said Mildred.

"Rather dull this afternoon at croquet, wasn't it?" said Attie. "I thought I saw you all solemnly performing the game as if it were a rite to the furies."

"Perhaps—it may have been dull," said Milly, as if the idea had only just occurred to her. "Yes; perhaps that is why the game seemed rather long, and my feet ached a little, Attie."

"Ah, Milly, Milly! don't be a weathercock, whatever you are. Didn't you profess to like that centre of gravity just now?"

"Like him? yes, of course!" and Milly seemed rather desirous to change the conversation. "But one thing I cannot imagine, and that is what Sir Arthur would be like at a picnic."

"A picnic! What are you talking about?"

"Aunt Prissie was talking about the lovely weather this afternoon, and saying she wished we could make a little expedition before the Indian summer, as she calls it, is over. She wants us and Marion and Henry and the other Burtons to go and picnic at the Castle."

"The Castle" was the grand feature of the neighbourhood, a relic of ancient days in a charmingly ruined condition. It was some seven miles from Middleborough, and the leading idea of the holiday excursionists of that quiet place.

"She wants Sir Arthur to go too, I suppose?" said Attie.

"Oh yes."

"And that will just spoil it all," said Attie, as if she had measured the result to a fraction.

Milly did not contradict her—that was not Milly's way—but she certainly did not assent to the proposition.

"Mark my words, Milly," pursued Beatrice; "that picnic will be a bore."

In spite of this prophetic utterance, which was delivered with Attie's peculiar pop-gun style of emphasis, this picnic idea was pursued with a certain energy.

"There is one pleasant thing about it," said Lily, who objected to these small gaieties; "it will be positively the last of its race, for this year at least."

"And an October picnic is sure to give people cold," added Attie, with a confidential vindictiveness; "and an old man like Sir Arthur—almost a foreigner too, from living so long abroad—is the surest of all to catch it."

"Why do you wish for that?" asked Lily, rather surprised.

"Oh! the English climate will be in disgrace then, and he will go abroad again."

"His going or staying can make little difference to us," said Lily, with a sort of constrained haughtiness; and Attie suddenly blushed scarlet, and turned away. Lily had some annoyed consciousness that her sister had a special meaning in her words, and she was too much vexed at the absurdity, as she called it, to talk any more then.

"At any rate, you will have a day with Marion," said Attie, by way of consolation.

"I daresay it will pour with rain, and we shall none of us go," was Lily's reply.

Nevertheless, the appointed morning was bright and blue as possible; bringing another autumn message that was, after all, the best—the message of a calm bright day, not hopeful, not fearful, but resting in a memory of work done.

However, nobody seemed to listen to that message just then. There was a good deal of bustle and preparation for a start at Mrs. Braithwaite's, into which that lady was entering most heartily, in spite of many protests that "picnics were more plague than profit," in which Lily heartily agreed. The comfortable family coach was packed with various baskets, Mrs. Braithwaite, Lily, and Mildred; while Attie drove round in the little pony-carriage to pick up Prissie.

Mrs. Robarts was to drive with some Miss Burtons,

maiden aunts of Marion's husband, with money enough to make old maidenhood in their persons courted and respected. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Burton, with some friends, were to meet the rest at "the Castle." Some gentlemen they were to bring, Henry said, he was so afraid of having to "do all the waiting himself."

The whole of this party was slowly getting itself up the steep hill (the only one in that part of the world) which led to the Castle; greetings were being interchanged, and congratulations on the fineness of the day; when the last addition was observed coming briskly along the road.

This was Sir Arthur Marston, in a light and tidy vehicle, called by his groom "a little trap," which the master had apparently baited with flowers, such a beautiful nosegay was lying at his side.

Attie looked at these flowers with a feeling of hostility; and when the picnic party was descending, shaking hands, and chatting in an old courtyard by the Castle, she stood still to watch the fate of the bouquet, heedless of everything else.

Mrs. Robarts was welcoming Sir Arthur in her sweetest way, assuring him how little pleasure she had in such expeditions, but for her daughter's sake she must sometimes force herself to leave her son.

Sir Arthur, as usual, appeared to be congratulating

her on these fine sentiments, but he rather skilfully beat a retreat too, and was soon standing by Mildred, offering her his flowers.

"I thought so," muttered Attie to herself, with an expression that might have suited the utterance of melodramatic rivalry on her part.

And how did Milly receive the gift on *her* part? She did not say much, but she coloured, smiled, and looked so pleased, that Sir Arthur felt he had done the right thing in presenting his bouquet.

"Sir Arthur appears to be quite attentive to Milly," said Mrs. Robarts to Mrs. Braithwaite, in a tone that did not express a great deal of satisfaction.

"Is he?" returned Milly's mother, very coolly. "Oh! I should think he looks upon her as a mere child, and is only good-natured to her on that account. We used to be intimate with him years ago."

"Very probably," and Mrs. Robarts seemed more contented. "But do you think there is any danger of our dear Milly's misunderstanding these good-natured little attentions of his?"

Mrs. Braithwaite laughed very frankly.

"What an old matchmaker you are," said she. "My girls don't think of such things at seventeen." And then she changed the conversation, for this kind of subject never pleased her much.

"Of course the grand object on these occasions is

the dinner," said Mrs. Robarts, laughing—"horrible though it is, in the midst of the beauties of nature; so the best thing for us to do will be quietly to explore the wood and find out the nicest place for our dining-room table."

"What owls we must be, to come out and look for a makeshift table when we have proper ones at home!" said Mrs. Braithwaite, letting herself be led off towards the pretty little covert at the foot of the Castle hill, dignified by the name of "the wood."

Their road happened to lead them past Sir Arthur, and Mrs. Robarts called him softly to come with them and explore. He came, perhaps a little reluctantly, from Milly's side, in spite of Mrs. Robarts' soft voice and fair face.

She smiled, however, as she carried him away; it might be that Mrs. Braithwaite was unjust to her, and that she did not deserve to be called a match-maker after all.

"This is too lovely," sighed Mrs. Robarts, as they came under the soft shadows of the trees, with the capricious dashes of sunlight trembling through here and there, and lighting red gleams in the chestnut leaves. "I almost grudge it to myself, when I think that it cannot be shared by all I love."

"It must be a sad reflection," answered Sir Arthur, with his usual courtesy. "But, at the same time,

you might remember how you brighten other paths more than nature even brightens your own."

Sir Arthur had a regular little barrel-organ of compliments, which he could always turn "to please a lady's ear." But Mrs. Robarts thought the music was improvised for herself, and felt quite touched.

Mrs. Braithwaite smiled a little at the gushing of her neighbours, "for they have quite the wrong sort of listeners," she said to herself; and then Sir Arthur turned to her.

"Is not this an excellent place for our dining-room?" he said.

"Yes; people generally come here," she answered. "Look at those black marks of their fires."

"You rob us of our poetry by pointing to our picnic ancestors," smiled Sir Arthur.

"I'm sure I ought not to rob anybody of poetry," she returned, "for I should not know what to do with it when I had got it.

Sir Arthur felt sure that poetry, like all other precious things, would be perfectly safe in Mrs. Braithwaite's hands; which brought Mrs. Braithwaite privately to the painful but certain conviction that the man was an owl—"an owl" being Mrs. Braithwaite's final word of depreciation. Meanwhile, they had determined that this spot should really form their

dining-hall, and Mrs. Braithwaite escaped to give some directions to her servants.

Sir Arthur might perhaps have followed her, but Mrs. Robarts had seated herself upon a fallen tree and looked conversational, so that he found himself constrained too to sit down and begin to talk.

The conversation was not particularly interesting, for it was carried on quite conscientiously by two persons whose aim it was to say "the right thing" about everything — literature, nature, or art — the "right thing" being, of course, what a sufficient number of critics had pronounced before.

This lady and gentleman would not have been guilty of an original sentiment for the world. But they conversed with each other in a well-informed manner, using the good grammar and the good taste laid down, as they supposed, by equally infallible laws. The conversation at least possessed the merit of not being in the smallest degree exciting.

Anyhow, it beguiled the time till the sound of many footsteps came rustling through the grass, and the rest of the party disturbed the *tête-à-tête.*

## CHAP. V.—FORTUNE-TELLING.

THEY did that day what most picnic parties do: they made themselves elaborately uncomfortable, and then tried to make themselves comfortable again. Having rejected the conveniences of their dining-rooms for the present, they made bad substitutes of all that came to hand; they found tables in grass, wine-cellars in the trees, and chairs in everything.

Henry Burton and his friends made themselves generally useful; there was an ingenious friend who contrived everything, a hilarious friend who made puns over everything, and a short-sighted friend who tumbled over everything. As to Mr. Burton himself, he helped them all in turns; while Sir Arthur showed a becoming readiness for any service that might be required of him, and an equally becoming resignation when he found that nothing was required. He sat down by Milly, who was holding a salad bowl while Attie mixed the salad in it.

"This is charming," he said. "In these rustic

scenes we see how superfluous our luxuries are, and how little we miss them."

"Yes, certainly," said Milly, looking anxiously at the skirt of her dress, on which some of Attie's salad was falling.

"Case of 'man wants but little here below,' you mean," returned Attie easily, her eyes fixed on her bowl. "But that's not exactly the case. Sometimes man only gets little here below, but he certainly wants more."

"Oh yes, of course," from Milly.

"The wants are artificial, perhaps," suggested Sir Arthur, and proceeded with a few mildly philosophical remarks in the style of Télémaque.

"I don't think the wants are artificial, though of course the supply has to be," said Attie. "If one has to spend one's self, instead of anything else, upon one's wants, you know it is loss, not gain. Look at me using Milly as a table now."

Sir Arthur bowed, declaring that she had sufficiently proved her point, in such a manifestly saying-it-for-civility's-sake manner, that Attie felt crosser with him than ever. She turned away from the conversation, and by-and-by the "great event," as Mrs. Robarts called it—that is, the dinner—came. It went off brilliantly enough, though the short-sighted man did a great deal of damage among the china, and the punning

man was as bad with the Queen's English. But every accident was hailed with shouts of laughter, and so was every joke, so that the friends contributed not a little to the general merriment after all. Then came some singing, and then a little wandering about to see the old castle from various points of view. Milly wanted to sketch it, and Sir Arthur undertook to find a capital place, as he led her off to a seat under a tree which commanded a fine perspective of the castle.

"That is the very thing," Milly said, and she sat down to work; while Sir Arthur placed himself near to criticise, or rather to compliment, all she did.

"Let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady," said a croaking voice near her; and Milly started a little to see a gipsy close to her elbow. The gipsy was in traditional gipsy costume—a large scarlet cloak almost covered her, a black poke-bonnet hid her face, over which some locks of black hair seemed to be wandering.

"Do let me tell your fortune, pretty lady," she repeated, urgently.

"No, thank you," and Milly shrank away. "Really I had rather not."

"Does the apparition annoy you?" asked her companion. "If so, I will send her away; otherwise a magician might amuse the party."

"Oh, not at all," answered Milly, vaguely. "Don't

send the poor woman away; only, as to fortunes, I had rather not know."

"Don't say so, my pretty lady," pursued the gipsy. "Let me see your palm. Cross my hand with a piece of silver, and let me tell you true." She drew nearer, as if she were going to take hold of Mildred's hand, and the girl gave a little start of alarm.

"Be off," cried the gentleman, with a wonderful change of tone. "You see the lady doesn't want you here. Take yourself off."

The gipsy retreated a few steps, and, as he followed her to see her safely away, she beckoned him mysteriously. "A word with you where it won't frighten the lady," she whispered. "You wouldn't hear your fortune; hear mine. It's a very bad one. I've not got a place to go, and six poor children without a bit of bread. They shut up my husband for poaching, and we haven't a friend left in the world. Won't you help me, good gentleman?"

"I'd help you so far as to give you in charge to a policeman as a beggar and a vagrant, if I could find one," returned the gentleman. "Be off at once, and don't let me catch you about here again."

The gipsy gave a little cry.

"You wouldn't be so cruel," she said. "Would you? Now mark my words; you shall be sorry you spoke so to me before the day is over."

She stretched out her hand as if denouncing him, and then turned abruptly away among the trees.

"Is she gone?" asked Milly, apprehensively.

"Pray, do not distress yourself; I have dismissed her," answered the voice of Sir Arthur, changing back again to its blandest tones; and Milly glanced at the gipsy retreating through the trees. She did not go far, however, before she met some others of the picnic party, who merrily begged to have their fortunes told. Their shouts of laughter at the odd predictions they heard reached Mildred's ears as she sat apart, but she did not move to join the laughers.

The fortune-teller was gratified with various pieces of silver before she made her way out of the wood. She departed at last, and was walking along briskly to get to the other side of the hill, when she was aware of another gentleman, who did not belong to the party she had left.

He was standing, apparently lost in thought, looking at an excavation recently made in the hill to show its volcanic formation. It was Mr. Oakley, in fact; and he was so much occupied that he did not see the gipsy till she came up to him and spoke.

"May I tell your fortune, sir?" was her introduction of herself, which made him look round suddenly, and then laugh.

"No, thank you," he answered; "that is a service I had rather perform for myself."

"Cross the poor gipsy's hand with a piece of silver," whined the woman. "You'll never regret it. It brings bad luck to refuse a gipsy."

"I'm afraid I must take my chance of that," he returned absently, with his eyes going back to the strata. This brought out the gipsy's tragedy again; the children, the captive husband, her destitute condition—all was poured into Mr. Oakley's ears, and brought him back from geology at once.

"Poor thing!" he said compassionately, glancing at her shoulders, which were shaking with sobs. "Where are your children? Take me to them, and I will do what I can to assist you, if I find there is anything in my power."

"Oh, I couldn't think of troubling you so much, sir."

"No trouble! If you are really in distress it will please me very much to help you. There! don't cry any more, but let us go and see the children together. Which way is it?"

The genial tone of sympathy seemed to have a great effect upon the listener; the sobs suddenly ceased, and something like a laugh came from under the bonnet.

"Mr. Oakley, I really beg your pardon," cried the gipsy in another voice, making the gentleman jump very frankly. "I never meant to deceive you; only

when I saw you standing there I thought I would just try if you knew me."

The black bonnet was thrown back, the stray locks tossed away, and Beatrice Braithwaite's face looked out at him, half-laughing, half-alarmed. His own look of displeased surprise effectually made her alarm get the better of her laugh.

"Pray excuse me," she pleaded. "We are having a picnic up here, and I dressed up just for fun; and when I came round here, it was only to find a quiet place to take my cloak off. I had no idea of finding any one here, indeed."

"I am very glad to have afforded you any amusement," returned Mr. Oakley, rather haughtily; "but it was difficult for me at first to understand how I had been fortunate enough to do so."

"Oh dear!" cried Attie, in her genuine way. "I'm afraid I ought not to have interrupted you. It must have been a great bore when you were in the middle of your geology. How deliciously tidy that cut is in the hill-side," she added, glancing at it—"like a slice out of a cake. What have they done it for?"

"To show the effect of a volcanic eruption, I believe," he answered, less stiffly. "It has caused the strata, which would naturally have been lowest of all, to appear at the top."

"How very good of the volcano to set things in

"That depends. Look at Sir Arthur superintending little Milly's drawing all this time. Depend upon it he does not feel as old as she thinks him. I shall go and look after them."

"Attie! Attie!" shouted half-a-dozen voices; "where have you been?"

But Mrs. Robarts' anxiety seemed to be for Mildred, not for Beatrice, and she did not wait to hear the answer; she went to look over the "dearest child's" drawing, and admire the performance.

"The gipsy startled me, so that I made a mess there, you see."

"What frightened you?" cried Attie. "That charming gipsy! Why, I've been with her ever so long."

"Oh, Attie! how could you?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I could not help it;" and, fearing to betray her secret too soon, Attie ran away again, and Milly looked up from her sketch. The sun was getting low behind the castle, making a great confusion among her lights and shades; the rest of the party were scattered about talking, exploring, but drawing gradually to one centre as they began to feel that evening was coming on.

"What a capital day we have had!" said Mrs. Robarts, with a half-sigh—"almost too bright for *autumn.*"

"It has been a very bright day," said Sir Arthur, with a glance at Milly. "It will always be a delightful remembrance to me."

He seemed to mean more than usual with his complimentary look and bow, or Mrs. Robarts fancied so, as she turned away for a moment biting her lips. But she smiled again directly, and took Milly's hand with a soft caress.

"Dear child!" she murmured, "you would have been happier if poor Louis could have come."

"Of course, Aunt Prissie!" rather surprised. "But perhaps some day he will be able;" and Milly smiled brightly as she began putting by her paints and brushes.

"It is so touching," Mrs. Robarts was saying gently, "so very touching to me, to see the affection between those two dear children. It positively reminds me of Paul and Virginia."

"Charming," returned the affable gentleman, in his most affable manner, though really he did not hear what she said. His eyes were following Mildred, who had just dropped into a little group of friends on their way to the castle yard again. It was time to go; the red sun was just dipping out of sight, the heat was all gone, and a little chill wind was beginning to creep about in the trees, and give them an unmistakable hint to depart. The time for picnics was

over, it said, as it began to shiver in true autumnal fashion among the leaves.

Everybody began complaining of the cold, and putting on wraps in the courtyard; and Sir Arthur was begging Mildred to put on another shawl, when Attie came up laughing, flushed and breathless from a long run, and holding up something red. She had flown back for her goods, which was fortunate, as Mr. Oakley was standing sentinel over them till her return.

"Thank you so much for hiding them," she said.

"And thank *you* so much for hiding *me*," he returned; and so they parted excellent friends.

And now here she was, holding up something red to Milly, and laughing.

"Would you like to put this on?" she cried. "It is the gipsy's cloak."

Mildred stared with all her eyes, while Sir Arthur looked on with a puzzled solemnity that seemed to please the naughty girl.

"Attie! you the gipsy! what a shame!" Mildred cried. "Did you know it, mother?"

"Yes; she told me—a silly child!" said Mrs. Braithwaite; and all the party came round Attie, laughing, questioning, and scolding her; while the mother, a little disturbed at the disturbance, tried to get away from the subject. It was very ridiculous;

she had no idea Attie meant to make so much of it, she remarked; and then called the said Attie to find out the fate of a pet basket which had somehow wandered away.

All the while Sir Arthur stood gravely annoyed; to say the wrong thing, when he so specially prided himself on always saying the right one, was extremely disconcerting to him.

"I must make several thousand apologies," he said to Beatrice presently; "or rather I should make them for not recognising you, but that the excellence of your acting was a sufficient excuse for my blindness;" and once more came his favourite little air of congratulation. But still there was something of a disconcerted tone about him, which did not escape Mrs. Robarts.

"I think, had I known it, I would have tried to stop the masquerade," she said.

"That would have been cruel to us—to deprive us of the opportunity of admiring the young lady's genius."

"They *were* surprised, mother," said Attie, in a triumphant aside, to Mrs. Braithwaite; but the mother was a little vexed. It was one of those occasions when she was doubtful of herself, and uncertain if the 'liberty' system had not gone too far.

"I wish you hadn't given them quite so much of

it," she said. "These tricks are stupid things in a large party."

It would have taken an earthquake to disconcert Attie when she was happy; but she felt sorry the mother did not appreciate her jest, and turned to some one else.

"How could she do it?" exclaimed Milly, in a tone of surprise that was ready to become admiration or disapproval according to the reply that she might get.

"It was very ingenious," said Sir Arthur, civilly, of course.

"Attie *is* so ingenious," Milly returned, eagerly. "We none of us can do what Attie does."

"At any rate, I may be allowed to rejoice that her sister did not attempt any disguise. I must deprecate any change in what is perfect;" and there was a gently emphatic change in his voice, and his manner seemed to request her to notice how very complimentary he was.

Certainly Mildred did notice it, and was not sure whether she was pleased with it or not; but she was confused enough, blushing and conscious. She understood somehow that there was a special interest for her in Sir Arthur's look—that he placed her in the carriage with a special care, and gave her a very *special pressure* of the hand as he did so.

It was a curious sensation. Milly had always felt a child till that moment, and now there came a sudden sense that she had grown older; warm lips had been pressed to the bud, and the flower had opened. How strange it was!

She was sitting in the carriage again, driving through the cooler air, catching the last gleam of the sun low down in the sky. People were talking of the picnic—the weather—of Attie's trick. What was all the talk to her? A sudden transformation had come over her—a curious flush and gleam of life; there was a consciousness of a thousand fancies, hopes, dreams, fears never known before—all so confused and new, she felt.

Was the confusion happiness or pain? She did not know; but there is always something not quite free from pain in an awakened consciousness; if pain is not present in it, there is always an instinct that the consciousness gives a fresh aptitude for pain.

All that Milly knew was that some curious change had come over her since the morning.

When they were in their room that night, Attie could by no means make her sister out; Mildred would do nothing but sit by the window and look out at the stars with an absorbed and dreamy air.

"It's a very bad sign," Attie thought to herself—"a very bad sign. Marion got so stupid, and just in

that somnambulistic style. But oh! it must be impossible; Milly's such a baby, and he is quite old."

Milly did not notice her sister's bewilderment—did not notice anything outward. She was looking at a vague panorama unrolling before her eyes—dark, bright, mysterious; what could it mean?

And the individual who had had this power over her mind was of a very commonplace kind, and remained in a very commonplace mood. There is no reckoning, by what a person is, what influence he may exert over another mind and destiny. If the hand rests on the right spring, results may be startling, though the hand be weak.

Sir Arthur Marston drove round to the station as he came back from the picnic; he had to meet a friend. Not only *a* friend, but *the* friend, the only real one he possessed, his younger brother, who was rather a famous doctor; not very particularly famous as a doctor perhaps, but a great man at public meetings, philanthropic arrangements, and, in general, for attending to other people's business in a very clever way. Dr. Marston's wife was a lady who had such decided views of her own supremacy that he did not enjoy himself very much at home. Perhaps this accounts a little for the doctor's interest in flying all abroad; his home was on a plank, like a sailor's, but the plank *must form* part of a platform.

This last year, however, the doctor's voice had been heard less frequently; his hair had turned grey, and his head a little bowed. His only child, a fine boy in "the fourth" at Eton, had been drowned in a boat accident, and the active, bustling, vain man's heart was breaking.

This was the first time that the brothers had met since the dreadful funeral day, and the doctor seemed hardly able to speak at first. Sir Arthur was very good to him, welcomed him gently, and said little till he had brought his guest home and fed him.

The fire was welcome this cold evening, and they drew near it after dinner; and still they were rather silent, taking their wine and looking at the brisk, noisy flames. It was the doctor who broke the spell at last.

"It seems a lifetime since we were here together, Arthur."

"It is ten years," said the other, echoing the sigh with which the doctor spoke; then they were silent again, so silent that Arthur's voice seemed almost hoarse when he began once more.

"I am very glad to see you here just now, Reginald," he said; "for I want to talk over two or three things with you. I should like you to give me your approval, as I believe you are certain to do."

"Yes, yes," answered the other, dreamily.

"You know," continued Arthur, clearing his throat, and evidently preparing for a speech, "how my plans and hopes were frustrated by the early death of my dear nephew. While he lived I did not feel any repugnance in yielding to my fancy for living abroad and remaining unmarried. On the contrary, I looked forward to the accession of another Sir Arthur to this place with pride and satisfaction."

The doctor shook his head and looked into the fire.

"No," he said, unsteadily; "I thought you would marry." This was not true, but he spoke the lie mechanically; it was a habit he had acquired upon the platform.

"It was not my intention to do so; but this sad misfortune has imposed upon me new duties. I feel now that it will be your wish as well as mine that I should marry."

The doctor seemed to be looking after his vanished hopes in the fire; but he answered, "Certainly," and endeavoured to appear interested.

"I felt sure that it would be so."

"I am obliged to you, Reginald, for confirming me in this opinion. Then it will not startle you to hear that there is a young lady in this neighbourhood whom I should wish to make my wife."

The knell of those dead hopes was sounding so *loudly in the* doctor's ears that he seemed deaf to his

brother's words. Sir Arthur repeated, "I should wish to make my wife."

"My dear fellow, I am delighted to hear it. Who is it?" returned the doctor, rousing himself, still mechanically, for indeed the power of being "delighted" had gone out of him ever since his Arthur's brown curls had been laid out of his sight in a coffin.

But the poor father was living the conventional life that will go on after the life of life is dead, and he still professed himself "delighted," "honoured," "anxious," according to the needs of the moment, in phrases he had learned by rote. Sometimes he did not hear himself; sometimes the words sounded mockingly—how mockingly!—to his ears.

"Who is this young lady? I am most interested in anything you can tell me of her."

"There is a good deal of difference in our ages," said Sir Arthur. "She is not twenty yet, and I am forty; but that does not appear to me to be a barrier, if all other things are suitable."

"By no means," said the brother.

"In fact, it seems to me that I have greater hopes of happiness with a young and gentle girl than with a more formed, decided character. My habits are naturally fixed, and I should wish for a companion who could adapt hers to mine. Therefore I think it best to choose as I have done."

"You are engaged already?" asked the doctor.

"No, certainly not. Before consulting you," answered Sir Arthur, "I should consider nothing settled; or before——"

"Before asking the consent of the young lady," added the doctor, absently.

Sir Arthur looked for a moment disconcerted.

"That of course," he said. "But I should not take that step without consulting you.

It was one of those occasions when it is so agreeable to ask advice, because you know that it will be to do what you intend doing in any case.

The doctor's expected advice was given, and Sir Arthur said he should take it with all convenient speed. What would Milly have felt had she known that her future was thus quietly disposed of? How would it have broken on the dream which showed her, as she gazed on the night-sky, a future as brilliant as those same far-off stars?

## CHAP. VI.—A MISCHANCE.

AS Mr. Oakley was going into Louis's room one afternoon, a day or two later, he met Mildred coming out with tearful eyes.

"Don't be deceived by appearances, Mr. Oakley," said Louis, when they were alone. "It is Mildred who has been persecuting me—not the other way, though appearances are against me."

"She will not persecute you very bitterly, I dare say."

"No; but look here;" and Louis grew serious. "My mother has been setting her on me, to make me allow myself to be confirmed. The bishop is coming here; and Dr. Bird says I can be accommodated with a couch in the chancel, and the bishop is good enough to promise to come to me there. I have declined with thanks, which Milly thinks very impious, I believe."

"And your reasons for the decision?"

"I didn't burden her with them. I can't speak my mind to that dear little girl, nor to my mother,

but it is odd that they cannot guess how different my views are from theirs."

"No doubt they have some idea of that; but perhaps they think the truth is on their side."

"Truth! Oh, truth!" he repeated, wearily. "It is all 'words, words, words'—some words of which they have made masters instead of servants—the embodiment of certain ideas to them, of other ideas to me. But my hardship is that they will not be satisfied with my receiving their words unless I receive their ideas too."

He was in a state of repressed excitement, and his eager glance sought Mr. Oakley's thoughtful face, with its expression of patient waiting.

"Their receptivity is greater than their understanding, of course; and I don't want to alter them; nice women are always like that. But they want to place me under the same domineering of other men's thoughts—men who, reaching out after what they cannot grasp, proclaim that they have grasped it, and that I am to fall down and worship it. And why? If I look up to what is bright and true and good, aspiring after it, aiming at the best I can do—which is my perfection—what more should they require of me? And why should they who look up to brightness, goodness, and truth personified, and *seek to serve* that and reflect that—why should they

shrink with horror from me? My end is the same as theirs—the attainment of that utmost which is to each of us perfection."

Mr. Oakley drew a long breath, and looked at him sadly. "As to shrinking and horror," he said, in a quiet way, "let us leave dramatic terms alone, and approach the most awful of all subjects with awe. I should like to know if you claim to have a private religion of your own, or if you share any portion of a national faith?"

"As to faith, I don't pretend to any clear understanding of what you mean by the word. You use it technically, I imagine; and technical terms alarm me. My religion means to me something I am bound to do; it is a code of morality and beneficence. It is, in short, doing right."

"But is not another side of religion—the belief in a Power above us, and beyond our efforts, whose law has made the right—an essential result of human thought on these subjects?"

"You know how men have been guessing about that Power through all the ages. Nature's slow majesty has not sufficed them. They must have a personal King, who is good, wise, all-powerful. But look at the world—at the misery, the wrong, the suffering in it. Does it look like a place ruled by such a King?"

"At first sight pain is perplexing; to a great extent it is always a difficulty."

"It convinces me that this King cannot be what they represent Him. Power, might, I can believe in—but personal love!"

"God help you, Louis, and God forgive you for judging the mighty problem so lightly. Child, what do you know of this great mystery of suffering?"

"I have suffered."

"And have you not also learned? There are ends to which only suffering leads us. What should we be if we had never suffered? So far I can see in my own life that the pain was no accident, but the fulfilment of part of a great law; and it may well make me believe that, if I could see more deeply into the great life of the world, the result would be the same. Wait—suspend your judgment on the universe and its Ruler till you have had larger experience of life. There are other grounds upon which you could reason more easily."

"As what ground?"

"Christianity is not like a system of philosophy—it claims to rest upon a statement of historical facts. Take the cardinal fact—Christ's resurrection. If that can be proved, surely He was what He claimed to be, and all arguments against a divine personality must fall before the fact that He is."

"It is a great *if*."

"Have you tried it? Have you examined the conditions of the problem? There is the great narrative in the Gospel of St. John. Have you given it a close critical investigation? Have you submitted it to an analysis verse by verse, weighing every phrase, allowing to each its evidence of a living unity?"

"No."

"Let me recommend you most earnestly to such a study of it. I think you will be able to convince yourself that it is the narrative of an eye-witness, with certainly every means of ascertaining the truth of what he relates. It seems to me evidently written by one familiar with the topography of Jerusalem, acquainted with the Temple worship, with phases of Jewish thought that had all passed away before the second century. What archæology was there then to bring these details to light again? And if St. John was indeed the follower of Christ, how could he have been deceived about the Resurrection? How could such a deception have attained its place in the life of the Christian Church? That the first day of the week was observed as the day of resurrection, you will find in the second century. Historical facts are more easily examined and reasoned upon than the origin of evil, or of pain."

"I will study what you like; but it will not help me."

"That is true. *Sans cesse la raison raisonne et n'a jamais guéri personne.* You may gain so far as to see we have reason to believe; and yet you will not have gained the Christian's faith—that is, of moral, not of intellectual origin. Our Teacher said, 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed;' and that blessing is not given to them because they believe; the blessing is found in believing. If we could actually test Christianity, and prove it like a sum, little would be gained; it must be apprehended by the spiritual faculties to which it is addressed. But the beginning of conviction is made by facing your difficulties bravely, and seeking an honest solution for doubts—never in cherishing them, never in looking on them as a sign of intellectual superiority."

"Pardon me. But have you so examined and proved yourself?"

"Never for my own satisfaction. The Bible was my mother's book; and I thank God that He has kept me faithful to what she taught me as a child."

His voice got lower, while a more sorrowful look came over his face; and he did not pursue the subject, but turned to their ordinary work. Afterwards he stood a moment by the boy's side, with his

hand on his shoulder; and Louis could feel that the hand was not quite steady.

"Poor fellow!" he said, in a low voice; "poor fellow!" Then he turned away abruptly, and was gone without another word.

In fact, Mr. Oakley was troubled about Louis, and, as was his wont when he was troubled, he went out to walk it off. This afternoon, though the twilight was gathering, and the late October wind blowing coldly around him, he walked off at a brisk pace, and soon found himself near a little wood some two miles from Middleborough. It was a very tame affair, a little pet wood of Lord Middleborough's; but this evening, when the sun was going down in stormy clouds, and the wind, growing wild at the thought of the coming darkness, began tossing the branches and whirling the withered leaves, it seemed as weird as any forest. The place was full of voices with the wind among the leaves; Mr. Oakley stood listening, as if they had a special message for him. The leaves went fluttering past, yellow and strange, like the ghost of summer joys. There was no cheer in nature's voice that night; and yet, as he stood there quietly, with folded arms, listening, his brow cleared, and a great calmness came over him. It set a seal almost of majesty upon his strong mouth and deep-set eyes.

"It is like a white thing flitting between the trees."

Why did the words come back to him in a clear girlish voice? Words do come back so strangely sometimes, like the echo of a sound we have not heard.

"And there is something moving through the trees," he thought next; "something grey—not flitting about, but rushing straight on."

It was a woman's figure coming towards him, and something, perhaps that echo in his thoughts, made him think it looked like Beatrice Braithwaite. It came nearer, and now it was no fancy; it was Beatrice herself, rushing along like the wind, with her grey dress fluttering, catching in the branches, as she forced her way heedlessly along.

Beatrice! She came up to him, flushed and panting, with a look of fright on her face. She was flying past him, but he stepped in her way and stopped her.

"Oh, don't! don't stop me!" she cried, excitedly. "I must go! I must go!"

"What is it? What has frightened you? Can I not help you?"

"Oh no, no! I must get a doctor or somebody."

"What is the matter?" and, to his own great surprise when he thought the matter over afterwards, he laid his hand upon her arm to detain her. He felt how she was trembling.

"Tell me; I will fetch anybody you want."

"Oh! don't help me!" and Attie burst into tears.

"It's Lily! I pulled her down the rock there, and she's killed. I'm sure she's killed."

"Hush! hush!" said Mr. Oakley, as quietly as if she had told him she had killed a caterpillar. "I cannot think anything so dreadful has happened. Where is she?"

"In the wood there."

"Alone?"

"No; Hannah is with her," sobbed Beatrice.

"You were not walking? Where is your carriage?"

"We sent it away for an hour—back to Middleborough."

"I'll see about that and the doctor. Go back to your sister, please. You will find her better now, I hope. The rock is not a very steep place to slip down."

He waited a moment to see her take her way through the trees again, and then hurried down the road.

Beatrice had never felt so frightened in her life; she could hardly stand as she turned away; but instinct told her anything was better than keeping him, so she made her way back again trembling.

It was in the midst of the little wood that she had left her companions; and when she came tottering back it was to find them in unchanged positions—Lily lying on the ground, white and motionless, and

the old servant, in great terror, sprinkling her face with lavender water and raising her head. The sight again scattered Attie's senses.

"She is dead! I know she's dead!" she exclaimed. Hannah, who had once been her nurse, looked round reproachfully.

"Don't you make a noise, and put yourself about, miss," said she; "she's in nothing but a faint. You young ladies have no business to be climbing about on these stones, that's all."

There was a rockwork erection under the trees, down which Attie had been hurrying her sister, when she fell; and Lily still lay at its foot.

Just now she began to show some signs of life, and Attie bent over her impetuously.

"Don't put your face so close; let her breathe, poor dear," pursued the disturbed Hannah. "I thought you had gone to look after the carriage, miss."

There was no answer; Beatrice was too much absorbed in watching her sister.

"Oh! she's opening her eyes," she exclaimed. "Look, look, Hannah; she is opening her eyes."

"She'll open them fast enough, if you'll let her be," returned the old woman. "But I expect she's sprained her ankle; and she's shivering, poor dear. She was so hot climbing, and now this cold wind and damp grass is enough to give her her death—all because

you young ladies wish to get a lot of rotten wood, good for nothing, not even to light a fire with."

Lily was meanwhile beginning to be conscious of her situation, and she made an effort to sit up; while Hannah adjured her to be still, and Attie to find the carriage.

"I met Mr. Oakley; he's gone for it," said Beatrice, breathing more freely, while Lily tried again to rise, but the pain made her too faint. All the while the sky was darkening and the wind sweeping past, giving them a sense of peril, not to say of guilt. They huddled close together, until footsteps were heard, and some one approached, hastily crashing through the trees. Shy Lily, who would rather have endured a martyrdom than uttered a complaint before her natural enemy, "a stranger," felt extremely horrified at being found in such a scrape. The sky could not be too dark now; she only wanted night to cover her with its thickest veil.

Mr. Oakley's rapid strides reached them in a moment, and he was soon bending over the discomfited little group, appearing, to Beatrice at least, a very embodiment of help and consolation.

"Your carriage is here," he said. "I met it, fortunately. Will you let me help you to reach it?"

"Help her!" Poor Lily did not know how to move, but she must rise now, if she died for it; and, sum-

moning all her resolution, she struggled to her feet, and made her way somehow, leaning on Mr. Oakley's arm and Beatrice's, through the wood. It was very hard to do, though, and she fainted again when they had placed her in the carriage. Beatrice crept in after, looking subdued and terrified.

"Never mind; she will be better soon," said Mr. Oakley, giving Attie a glance of compassion.

"Make haste home, without going by Middleborough," he said. "I will send the doctor."

They drove away, and Beatrice was once more absorbed in watching her sister; but it occurred to her afterwards how kind and cordial Mr. Oakley had been, and she wondered how he could seem so different at different times.

The while their poor mother, unsuspicious of their troubles, was enjoying an afternoon's gossip with Mrs. Robarts, and Milly was sitting by Louis, reading poetry in her soft, dreamy voice. She was wondering a little at his face, paler, sterner than usual. He did not look as if he were listening to her, she thought; but if she stopped he begged for a little more, in case it did not tire her; so Milly cooed on obediently.

The two mothers' heads were very close together; Mrs. Braithwaite was speaking with her usual easy frankness, Mrs. Robarts listening with her graceful

air of attention, but with an unusually keen look in her eyes.

"Milly is such a child, it seems an absurdity to think of her future yet."

"To be sure," Mrs. Robarts assented. "But still seventeen is sometimes rather conscious of being seventeen, and thinks itself a great deal older than we think it, or than Sir Arthur thinks it, perhaps."

"Milly is a child in every way, a perfect child," the mother repeated, trying to set at defiance an idea that had come over her—a fancy that the child was gone, while the mother thought she was holding it fast. But it is not possible to defy such fancies; that same notion now took up a commanding position in Mrs. Braithwaite's mind, and grinned at her defiantly.

"You know I always tell you, Prissie, that you are a dreadful old matchmaker; because you have only one daughter of your own, you want to victimise my party."

Mrs. Robarts gently shook her head.

"I only want to warn you," she said. "You would not like Milly to be made uncomfortable. Why not go to the sea at once, as you talked of doing? Sir Arthur will probably be away in the winter, and by next spring things may be different. I should go, if I were you."

Mrs. Robarts gave a very sharp glance as she spoke;

it was as if something untamed within her looked for a moment from her eyes; but Mrs. Braithwaite did not notice it, and next moment her companion was as gentle and dovelike as ever.

"It's not a bad idea," said Mildred's mother. "And would you come too?"

Mrs. Robarts shook her head again.

"It would not do to move Louis just now," she said.

"I thought the doctor wanted him to go."

"Not just now; by-and-by, I hope; but just now it would be too much for him. I would like it so much myself; but of course his health is the first consideration."

"Of course," Mrs. Braithwaite said, innocently. She believed her companion, who no doubt believed herself. The weight of an affectation would be almost too heavy to bear, unless we could make our assumptions almost realities to ourselves. There is something startling in the rapidity with which a heart that is not single will take a hint from itself. Such an appearance has to be put on; so such a feeling has to be got up—is got up—rises, as if by magic, in the heart—shining with most real tears, or sparkling with smiles that must surely be unfeigned, they look so bright. We all know there is an electro-plate that is a perfect substitute for real silver. It is so shining, so heavy, so durable; it is everything but—silver.

Mrs. Robarts could never have dragged through her part if she had told herself, in so many words, "I must appear a tender and devoted mother, and I must get the Braithwaites out of the way; so perhaps I shall improve my position." This advantage might come to her by the way, certainly; but her way was a good way, she told herself, and it was for her children's sake she desired a better position. She would consider Milly's happiness too; poor little Milly! who could only be overpowered by this grand gentleman's attentions.

It would be all for the sake of her dear ones if she formed any new connection; she would only contemplate what was best for them all. Louis, indeed, might be troublesome about it; he would sometimes deal a cruel blow at her arguments, and make them ring hollow; but she was accustomed to do him good in spite of himself.

Only a mother could know a mother's feelings, especially a widowed mother's; and Mrs. Robarts took refuge in self-pity, the surest asylum against self-reproach.

Mrs. Braithwaite, who did not know what it was to juggle with her feelings, or to do anything with them but control them, was utterly unconscious of all that was passing in the mind of her companion. They were going on discussing their plans, when the door

opened, and Milly herself came in; she walked softly, as she always did, but there was a little rustle of hurry and alarm about her that they noticed at once.

"Mother," she said, putting her hand on Mrs. Braithwaite's shoulder, "Attie has sent word that Lily has slipped down in the wood and sprained her ankle, and they want us to go home."

"Slipped down! Silly child, what did she do that for? I'll run home at once, Priscilla. These girls are always in some scrape."

"Attie has sent the carriage," Milly said; and the two went off together, the poor mother quiet enough outwardly, but inwardly scared at an accident in her precious flock. At the house door she jumped out before Milly could help her, and hurried in. There was the usual confusion that prevails when there is "something the matter" in a house—the cook appearing in inhabited regions, the maids whispering in the passage, the gardener at the kitchen door.

"Where's Miss Lily?" Mrs. Braithwaite asked the wandering cook; and that official pointed her to the drawing-room.

"Oh, mother!" cried Attie, deplorably, as she opened the door. "That's right; we want you so."

"It's nothing; I hope they did not frighten you," came more weakly from Lily. "I've only sprained my ankle."

"Only—and enough too," responded Mrs. Braithwaite, cheerfully. "So they brought you in here, did they? You had better have gone to bed at once."

"She was so faint, ma'am, we brought her in here," said Hannah; and Mrs. Braithwaite looked round the room.

"What a mess you are in here!" she exclaimed; and they certainly were. The kitchen candle was flaring in the draught from the door—the curtains were withdrawn—the furniture, which always mysteriously sympathises when anything goes amiss, seemed all in the way, the chairs standing like a routed army. Hannah's remedies were all about—on the floor, on the chairs, by the sofa; and in the midst knelt Attie, watching the patient with a dismal attention.

"Attie, put the chairs straight; and Hannah, please, go and get a lamp," said Mrs. Braithwaite. Having dispersed the enemy, she looked at her daughter, who was flushed and frowning with pain.

In a few moments Mrs. Braithwaite had cut open the kid boot which was paining her, and taken it off with a light touch a surgeon might have envied. Attie returned the while.

"It seems all right, now you have come, mother," she sighed. "We were so frightened."

"It doesn't seem all right to me," returned Mrs.

Braithwaite, "while all my work things are lying on the floor; go and pick them up, please. That's right, Hannah; put the lamp on the table, and take this flaring candle away. Then, please, get me the large red flannel dressing-gown out of my room."

"How different everything seems when you are here, mother," whispered Lily, relieved of the tormenting boot, released from her "tight things," and warmly wrapped in the comfortable flannel. "I don't think we want a doctor now."

"She's such a comfortable mother," said Attie.

Certainly the whole household leant on Mrs. Braithwaite; she was one of those happily constituted people who are not only mistresses of the house, but mistresses of the situation also.

## CHAP. VII.—SICK AND SORRY.

SERIOUS illness makes a strange change in a household; the hush, the sort of strained attention to the one thing, the impossibility of really heeding anything else, the sensation of quiet and yet of hurry, the feeling that the whole outside world has retreated somewhere far away, and that the only visit to care for is the doctor's—such are the experiences of every household wherein a beloved one is very ill. Such a change fell now upon the Braithwaites' home.

Lily, the quiet, stately creature, had not recovered from the shock of that evening. The accident, indeed, had been slight in itself, but, lying there upon the wet grass, she had, as Hannah said, "taken a chill," which was followed by a severe attack of rheumatic fever. Calmly as Lily lay, with a majestic patience that shrank from all complaint, the evident suffering was terrible to her nurses, especially to that untiring head-nurse, her mother.

"Always ready, always cheerful and self-possessed, there never was a better nurse than Mrs. Braithwaite,"

the doctor said, and the household could echo his words. Everything seemed to droop in her absence, when the patient's entreaties sent her away to rest.

Mrs. Braithwaite had her own sort of philosophy to bear her through dark days; nobody knew how much her own heart failed her, how little strength she felt in reserve. She would not dwell upon that; she would look neither backwards nor forwards; she would take the present moment as it came, trusting that the next would bring its own strength with it.

That was Mrs. Braithwaite's philosophy—a philosophy that did not know itself, any more than her unselfishness, her kindness, her candour knew themselves. There were no mirrors in Mrs. Braithwaite's mind; simply and industriously doing her best, she had never found out how fair that best was. Withal those were weary weeks, as autumn touched tree after tree outside, and they seemed to blaze up in red and yellow flames, and then go out into ashes of dead leaves; as the cold wind began to creep round the house, and the rain fell in the night-time while they were watching, and made those strange sounds on the roof that rain never makes by day.

Milly and Attie would go nowhere but for occasional visits to Louis, or to walk a little in the garden when their mother drove them out of the house.

Sir Arthur had not been seen since the day of the

picnic, though his servants brought his kind inquiries constantly. The weary autumn weather had been too much for him, and as he did not hunt, and the Braithwaites were invisible, he took himself off to London, and worked at philanthropy with his brother.

Other friends were constantly at their door, Mr. Oakley among the number. He came with a great longing to see Beatrice again, wondering if she had recovered from her fright, her innocent remorse. Very earnest and slow to change himself, he could hardly imagine the ease with which this girl could pass from one state of feeling to another.

Attie used to say of herself that she was "made of India-rubber." She had quite cheered up after she had told her mother all about the accident, and her horror at having pulled Lily down; and Mrs. Braithwaite had answered that they were both silly children, and that it was "more by good luck than good management that there were not four sprained ankles and two rheumatic fevers in the house." Then Attie became, as usual, the most sanguine of the party, and always assured Marion, Milly, and any other inquirer that "Lily was a great deal better, and going on capitally to-day."

"Attie always takes a bright view," Milly sighed one day, when the inquiring friend happened to be Mr. Oakley, and he caught them in the garden.

"Not always, I should think," he said; and then he stopped and looked hurriedly at Beatrice, fearing to be uncivil in discussing her, or to offend her by recalling her emotion. But such ideas were far from Attie's mind; she inherited her mother's unconsciousness, and acted so intensely with her whole heart and soul from the feelings of the moment, that she seemed to have no sentinel sentiments left to watch what the others were doing. A peculiar temperament this, and not free from a good deal of danger; but Mr. Oakley, profoundly conscious of his own self-consciousness, looked upon it with unmixed admiration.

Attie only laughed at what he had said.

"Oh, Mr. Oakley remembers how frightened I was when Lily fell," she said. "I never had such a fright in my life."

He smiled again, and then sighed; smiled to see a nature so free from morbid introspection, sighed to think it was so rare. He even forgot to be shy, he was so absorbed in observing her. They were moving through the garden as they spoke. It was a bright, frosty morning in November, all sparkling and white under the blue sky. The sisters had been refreshing themselves with a walk through that glistening freshness, when Mr. Oakley came upon them with his inquiries.

"It is a holiday at school to-day," he said; "that

is how I come to be roaming about at this unlikely time. I am going to read with Mr. Robarts this morning, and I came round this way first to get your news for him.

"Would you mind taking Louis a book I have from him?" Milly asked, in her beseeching way: she always made her requests pathetically, as if she were desiring the greatest favour in the world. "It is only a very small one."

Of course he would be only too happy, and size would be no object; so Mildred went off to fetch it, while the other two took a turn on the crisp gravel. He began abruptly—

"And so you—— I beg your pardon; I was about to make a very personal remark."

"I don't care," returned Beatrice, in her usual pop-gun fashion. "Go on making it."

"I obey. And so you soon recover from a fright, Miss Braithwaite?"

"Soon get over most things, I fancy; that is one of the advantages of being made of India-rubber."

"Rather like a mimosa, that soon unfolds its leaves again after it has curled them up."

Attie began to laugh.

"Please, don't compare me to a sensitive plant," she cried. "That's a much worse personal remark than the other."

"I beg your pardon," which was said so honestly and humbly that Attie was half-disconcerted.

"Nothing to beg pardon for," she hastened to say. "You are an Englishman, so you have a right to be personal, if you like."

"And why?"

"Why? Of course it's pointed out by the language. Germans, when they are civil, call each other 'they;' and Italians and French people go on 'she'ing' and 'he'ing' each other; but an Englishman just blurts out a great 'you,' and has done with it."

"And that is best? I should have thought it less pleasant to have the sense of your own personality forced upon you in that way."

"Of course it's best, because it's English," pronounced Attie; "and anything English must be better than anything foreign;" for Attie's patriotism was of a very simple kind, making Mildred laugh as she approached.

Mr. Oakley laughed too. "That is a true islander's argument," he said, and he seemed much inclined to linger and add more; but, with a little effort, he merely took charge of the book and a message, and departed.

The look of amusement soon left his face as he walked off alone, and fell into a brown study; indeed he was so lost in thought that he had passed Mrs.

Robarts' garden gate before he recollected himself. He soon stopped, however, and hurried back again to find Louis watching from the window.

"You forgot me," he called out, as Mr. Oakley came in. "What problem were you working at?"

"A very difficult problem," said the tutor. "I believe I was trying to find out how great a fool I was."

Louis laughed, and looked at him with a little admiration. He had grown fond of this man, with his odd lights and shadows, his pride and humility, his passing glimpses of deep feeling and patient thought. That subject of their great difference of opinion had not been renewed between them, but Louis was allowing himself to be led to those sources of conviction that Mr. Oakley found so satisfying. Indeed the boy had thrown himself into this study with all his might, the fresh strain upon his mind making him more nervous and excitable than ever. The eagerness with which he studied often startled his teacher; it was like the fierceness of a craving hunger. He grappled with mental difficulties as if they had been bodily adversaries, and threw into the struggle all the passionate vehemence of a most passionate nature.

"He ought to have worked a lot of this steam off in cricketing and boating," thought Mr. Oakley. "The

pressure on the brain is too much; he wants some physical outlet."

The doctor told them Louis needed rest; but there seemed in him no capacity for rest—it was only a change of work he would submit to. Once Milly's German lessons had been a sort of recreation, but, now that he had passed his little governess and plunged into Ewald, he worked as savagely at German as at Sanscrit. If they tried to interrupt him, he answered with nervous irritability, and drove them away—only Milly could sometimes draw him into nonsense talk, or Mr. Oakley beguile him with some less troublesome topic.

"You'll dine with us this evening," begged Mrs. Robarts, as the tutor was going away; "I promised Louis to persuade you. You know you have no school to-night."

Mr. Oakley looked a little shy; but he saw that she really wanted him: she reckoned upon his influence to soothe Louis a little; so he promised to come. He would rather have been alone that night, of all nights in the year; for he was a man very faithful to old memories, given to the observance of anniversaries; and this happened to be the saddest anniversary of all to him.

He had a way of keeping it with certain ceremonies of his own which were among the secrets of his life,

and he went to them when he had walked home through the bright winter sunshine and the melting glories of the white frost. Up in his own room he took out a miniature, and sat for a long time looking at it; it was the likeness of an old lady, with very white hair and dark earnest eyes. Then he unlocked a drawer, and drew forth a bundle of old letters, which he read through religiously.

Old letters! What faded, unhappy things they look! Fresh and cheery when they reach us first, flying in to our lives perhaps some morning like a butterfly coming through the window; but now they are old and put by, like that same butterfly impaled on a bit of cork in a specimen case. Could it ever have looked so bright, we wonder, such a fairy creature when it was on the wing?

Mr. Oakley finished his letters, reading sometimes with tearful eyes; and when he had quite finished them he put them by again; and then he kissed the likeness, and shut that up too. So he finished his devotion to his dead. This custom of his had survived the rush of many new feelings, and had still its own keen life in it. Such customs too often survive the feeling which gave rise to them, and are persevered in with a shadowy fidelity, by which the heart would prove to itself that it is not untrue. But this man knew no half-heartedness; and if the observances

had not been real to him, they would have been torn away at once out of his life.

That evening he was sitting alone with Louis after dinner; the invalid had seemed specially overwrought that day, and a decided tendency to snub everything that was said had made his mother suggest to Prissie that they should go and have a little music in the drawing-room.

"Unless you want us, Louis darling," she murmured softly, in a way that seemed to implore him to want her very much indeed.

"No, thank you; I want nothing," was the ungracious reply; and so the ladies had gone away.

Then Louis settled himself, as if more at ease, and looked a long time at the blazing fire without a word. The sound of the fire and of the wind, and the soft tones of the piano next door, made a pleasant accompaniment to silent thought.

Mr. Oakley was the first to break in upon it.

"You are very quiet to-night," he said.

"I like it sometimes; it makes a change after the talking powers of my womankind."

"You don't deserve womankind, ungrateful boy! If you had ever been banished from them you would know how to value them more."

"I should be charmed to have a lesson. But it's

all very well for you to talk, who only occasionally face other people's ladies."

Mr. Oakley looked into the fire.

"It's my birthday," he said, very abruptly. "There's an interesting historical fact for you. It has particular associations for me, and always makes me think of old times."

"Tell me about them," said Louis. "You have an unfair advantage over me, for you know all about me, and I nothing about you."

"My old times were not very bright," Mr. Oakley went on, with his eyes still on the fire, "and I generally shut up the thoughts of them in a strong room in my own mind, and only let them out now and then. My father was a man without any income but his curacy. He committed the crime of marrying on it; then worked himself to death in a typhus fever season, and left my mother alone in the world, as far as help went, but with two little children to take care of, a sister and myself. How she did take care of us, and labour through years of respectable poverty, is more than she could have told herself. When I was fifteen I began to help her, getting seven shillings a week in a coal merchant's office. I read and studied in the evenings; and when I was eighteen I got a place as usher in a little school, and thirty pounds a-year. The boys used to laugh at my

old boots and threadbare coat. Poor fellows! they were a lowish set. The master was as ignorant an old ruffian as ever pretended to teach. I can't say more. I worked under him three or four years, hoping for better things, and my mother's brave faith kept my spirits up. Alice—that was my sister—had some teaching to do too. When we met in the evening my mother always set us off laughing and talking, and almost cheated us into feeling prosperous. But Alice was delicate; her cheeks and eyes got too bright, and by-and-by she went into a decline. When she was dying, and I couldn't help her with all my drudgery, I was almost out of my mind. I had tried to get a little by writing, but my first profits did not come till the day on which we buried my pretty sister. It did not seem much good then."

Louis's eyes turned to him sympathetically, but Mr. Oakley talked on dreamily, to the sound of the wind and the low music, as if he were repeating a story he knew too wearily well to heed its emphasis.

"That editor who sent me the money was the best fellow in the world, and he introduced me to Dr. Bird; they helped me on, and got me sent to college. There I worked like mad, thinking of the home I was to make for my mother. I did not see her often;

I was working too hard for her. The last time I saw her was on my birthday; she begged for my company on that day, though I was to take my degree in January. She looked very ill, I thought; but she laughed at me for being anxious, and talked in the old cheery way that had kept our hearts up all those years.

"The examination was over at last. I thought I had done pretty well considering, and I went to my rooms thinking what she would say if she saw my name among the wranglers. There I found a telegram saying she was dead. She would not let them send for me before, for fear of spoiling my chance. It didn't matter much then."

He stopped, and sat thinking; and once more the sound of the music and the wind passed by together. Louis said nothing, but waited till Mr. Oakley went on with his story.

"Dr. Bird made me go abroad as bear-leader to a youngster who had had a narrow escape of being an actual idiot. He was always throwing himself into hot water, and I was always fishing him up again, till, after a year of these excitements, his papa fetched him home, and had him married, and I had another of the same species to take care of for a year. Then I came home, and was ordained; and Dr. Bird brought me here. It is a noble calling; it crowns

my life. But you do not know what it is to have an empty home. I want you to make much of your people while you have them."

It was jerked out with the awkwardness of a reserved nature trying to force from itself an appeal to another's feelings.

"Thank you," said Louis, rather stiffly. "But you must make allowance for the difference. I am at the mercy of my people; you had to take care of yours."

"My mother never let me take care of her; she was my guardian angel—my light—my religion almost at one time; at least I got my religion from her."

Louis thought of the way in which he had said the Bible was his mother's book, and curled his lip with a sort of painful scorn.

"Was it my fault," he thought, "that *my* mother's religion seemed very respectable and proper for a lady, but a little hollow? A light! a guardian angel!"

He loved his mother, of course; but alas! he *saw through* her.

"And what an odd fellow he is!" thought Louis, again glancing at his companion; "so reserved about everything, and then telling me all this."

He did not see far enough into Mr. Oakley's mind

to perceive that the story had been told with an effort, only shown by the monotonous tone, on purpose to hint to Louis that he might set a higher value on his mother. Mr. Oakley did not like Mrs. Robarts; she had sometimes grated on the wretched sensitiveness engendered by the early suffering of his introspective nature. But, for his own mother's sake, he had a reverence for all women; and they, in return, usually found him one of the most awkward men alive. The poverty of younger days had taught him to shrink out of sight, and the unhappy lesson had not been unlearned by a few years of comparative prosperity. The bearing acquired in his "threadbare coats and old boots" kept to him still; and yet the most gallant knight never had more chivalry at heart than this creature, whose ungainliness veiled it effectually from mankind.

*That* Louis did partly penetrate with his clear glance, but no more; and whether the result was a weakness or a strength, he could not tell. Of one thing he was sure—every talk with his tutor made him better pleased with his companion, and more inclined to be biassed by Mr. Oakley's views. It was a victory very unconsciously achieved; but the lonely man felt cheered by the look of interest and affection which shone upon him from Louis's eyes that night. Still the great subject, always upper-

most in Mr. Oakley's mind, was not renewed between them.

No one knew how long after others slept Louis was poring over the beloved disciple's words about Christ — awful midnight hours, with the stars shining overhead that once were watched by a shepherd boy in Palestine; the stars that bring through all the ages the message they brought then—"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"

But there was no message in them yet for Louis, neither in the written words nor in the changeless stars.

"Louis! Louis!" cried Prissie, bursting into his room next day, and up to his table; "what do you think?"

"That you are making a horrid row, and upsetting the ink," growled her brother. "Get away, pray."

"No—but really—such an odd thing. The doctors want to send Lily away to be quite quiet at Hastings, with only Aunt Marion; and she wants you and mother and me to go and stay at their home with Attie and Milly. Won't it be fun?"

"I don't know what you mean by fun. Have the goodness to walk off; I am busy."

But Louis felt disturbed; the being moved

was a trial to him, though it was pleasant to think of Milly's gentle presence to be constantly enjoyed.

"Why can't they come here?" he asked, as Prissie was going.

"Oh, there's not so much room, you know; and Aunt Marion said it would give mamma too much trouble."

In fact, Mrs. Braithwaite was better off than Mrs. Robarts; so all arrangements had to be made to the advantage of the latter lady, who, with all her sentiment, was in the habit of looking rather sharply after getting her penny's worth for her penny. She often shared little expenses with Mrs. Braithwaite, and the way in which Mrs. Robarts always happened to have the best of it was truly edifying.

The present little arrangement was soon made on the usual principle, and Mrs. Braithwaite was thankful to leave her party under such good guardianship, since the doctor insisted so much on absolute quietness for Lily. Three days afterwards the mother and daughter were resting in their rooms on the Marina, and Milly was contemplating Louis and his couch settled in the Braithwaites' drawing-room.

"It looks so natural," she said, smiling.

"But I never was here before," Louis returned.

"Oh, to be sure not—not natural perhaps, but so very nice," amended Mildred.

"Natural" or not, the arrangement seemed to suit everybody; Louis especially looked so bright the next morning that his mother would have congratulated herself upon it openly, but for the certainty that clouds would come on if she did.

"What a lovely day!" cried Attie, by way of an original remark, as she looked out that afternoon.

It was another sparkling day, all hoar frost and bright blue sky, one of those cold bright days that make you briskly cheerful; summer beauty may beguile you to loiter and be sentimental, but winter beauty is sharp, and, policeman-like, bids you "move on." The young people felt its influence, diligently took out their work, and sat down near the blazing fire, talking and laughing merrily; while Mrs. Robarts retired to the morning room to write letters. The laughter and the talk were perhaps all the freer, and the little party was so happy, that all felt it a great interruption when a sound of horses outside and a ringing bell announced the approach of visitors.

Mildred went to a side window to peep, and flushed crimson when she saw who it was.

"It is Sir Arthur Marston," she said, hurrying back. "I did not know he had come home."

Louis stopped laughing, and looked very cross all at once.

"I hope he's not coming in," grumbled Beatrice. "He's a sort of person who's always coming when he's least wanted."

"Or so it appears, because he's never wanted at all," Louis said.

But the visitor was innocently walking up the stairs, and the amiable remarks had to cease as he walked in. There was some lack of cordiality in Attie's and Louis's greeting, and Prissie was too shy and awkward to do anything but put out her hand rather as if she were afraid he would bite it.

But Sir Arthur was not thinking of them; Mildred's little blushing smile and half-breathless greeting were what he wanted, and he noticed nothing else.

Then Prissie ran away "to tell mamma," and Sir Arthur began his "kind enquiries." He trusted their invalid was much better, since he heard she was at the sea.

"Oh yes, thank you, much better," murmured Mildred; which Attie qualified by remarking, in an uncompromising tone, that Lily was not at all strong yet.

Sir Arthur feared that could scarcely be; he had

been truly sorry to hear that Miss Braithwaite continued so weak.

"She is a great deal better, though," returned Attie, who seemed anxious to contradict everything she could.

At the same moment the door opened again, and Mrs. Robarts came in, rustling in silk, and gracefully eager in her welcome.

"This is so good of you," she said; "I know how your kindness has sympathised with our anxiety."

"If I may be allowed such a claim, I am sure about my sympathy." He looked towards Milly; but Mrs. Robarts seemed rather inclined to take his kindness to herself.

"Oh, I am sure of it," she repeated, softly; "and, as these dear children have no doubt told you, our sweet patient is rapidly improving."

So Sir Arthur had heard—*da capo*.

Then Mrs. Robarts wished to be informed about his London news: he had merely been occupying himself with a philanthropic scheme of his brother's. Mrs. Robarts, always so much interested in philanthropic schemes, desired to hear all about it; and Sir Arthur had to enter into the subject more at length, drawn into details by the lady's sympathetic questioning.

Meanwhile, Attie took up her work with a little ostentation of paying no attention; Milly stood wavering near the window, trying to make up her mind as to whether she ought to ring for five o'clock tea; Prissie got behind the sofa, and suppressed an inclination to giggle; and Louis listened to the talk with frowning impatience.

Sir Arthur had effectually transformed the party.

"Certainly there are statues and statues. I think this one will please you. I have a photograph of it here."

He went across the room to show it to Mildred, while Beatrice secretly despised him for the fine Russian leather pocket-book he drew out, scenting the whole room. She spitefully quoted to herself, "A fine puss gentleman that's all perfume." But Milly was exclaiming at the statue, "How very handsome! I like that!"

"Just as if Milly wouldn't say that of anything she was called upon to admire," muttered Attie to Louis; while Mrs. Robarts was begging to have the photograph when Mildred had seen it. Sir Arthur had to carry it back to her, and she talked it over in the words of a connoisseur, trying to draw Louis to admire also; but only a sulky glance, and a cold, distant "Very good" could be got out of him. At this juncture tea appeared, and with it Attie's pet kitten, a lively quadruped, as eccentric as its mistress. During the tea distribution it managed to get under everybody's feet in turn, screaming, swearing, tripping them up, and so making itself agreeable.

"Pets are so charming," smiled Sir Arthur, when he had twice nearly tumbled over it, and was devoting it to the river, mentally, decorated with a cord

and stone. But he looked on it presently with more favourable eyes, for, growing bolder, the engaging little creature made a spring on to the tea-table, and overturned the cream in white currents on the floor. Prissie and Beatrice burst out laughing. Mrs. Robarts softly reproached them. There was, in short, a fracas, which allowed Sir Arthur to get a few words with Milly.

"I have thought so much about your anxiety this winter; may I trust it really is diminishing?" and the soft, confidential tones of his voice seemed suddenly to take her behind the scenes of private life.

Milly coloured again. "Oh yes; thank you," she answered, breathlessly.

"I felt sure of it; yet I longed to hear the assurance of it from your own lips;" the voice was lowered still—that was the only modulation of which it was capable, being singularly monotonous and unsympathetic. He could speak very roughly or very gently; but that was mere change of manner, not change of tone. "I wish I might ask you to believe how much it distressed me to think of your trouble, and to be able to do nothing to serve you."

"You are very kind," faltered Milly.

"I have hardly had the happiness of meeting you

since that delightful picnic. What a charming day we had! Did you ever finish that sketch?"

"I tried to finish it from memory, but I spoiled it."

"I wish I might see it again. I am certain it is charming."

"This terrible little cat," said Mrs. Robarts, appealing to them with a laugh, "will give you a bad opinion of pets for the future."

"On the contrary, it is a fascinating cat," and he looked at Milly; but there were no more private words to be had with her; his horse had been walked about a long time outside, and he had had enough of Mrs. Robarts' agreeable conversation. So he carried himself off rather promptly now, shaking hands very emphatically with Milly, and not noticing how coldly some others bid him good-bye.

Milly remained in a dream; what had happened to her she did not know. An hour had passed, and changed the bright winter afternoon into the dark winter evening; everything had gone into mourning out of doors; blacks and whites and greys had replaced the blue and sparkling silver. But within it was all different; some one had gone by, and dropped a word into her heart, and roused her once more to a sense of a change within. She remembered the day when she had been first called out of her meadow of buttercups and daisies into this curious place of

brighter flowers, very dazzling and glorious and bewildering. She had not found out yet whether these new flowers had any perfume; whether they were real or artificial, indeed; or dreamland flowers, never to be plucked and found full of real dewy freshness. There are strange things in that fairyland that lies so near to everybody, and vanishes just with the opening of our eyes. Some people have such a fair dream, they weep when they wake and find it out; weep, not because they have lost, but because there was nothing to lose.

"How foolish to weep for a dream," says common sense; but, ah! that is just the reason why they weep, because it was all—a dream.

By-and-by Mildred began to hear the voices round her again. Sir Arthur was gone, and they were all talking of him. Louis was sneering and very cross; Attie laughing at his civilities to the kitten, which he obviously detested; Mrs. Robarts trying to change the conversation. Milly did not follow what they were all saying; it came to her now and then in gusts, like the sound of the wind at night. It was, somehow, natural that the talk should be of Sir Arthur; it seemed the only topic to be interesting, as a matter of course, though why she did not know. Yes, it was all dreamy and unreal.

Have you ever gone out into clear air and found

yourself presently overtaken by a mist? All at once the landscape changes, the most familiar outlines become wavering and uncertain; you see ghosts for trees, smoky rocks for houses; even your own house gleams white and spectral through the vapour. All at once you walk as a phantom through a phantom land. So, mist-like, Milly's dream overtook her that afternoon.

By-and-by she found that her aunt was standing by her, putting a soft caressing hand upon her forehead, and saying it was hot, and she looked pale.

"I almost wish mamma had carried you off to St. Leonards too. You look as if you wanted some change, dear child."

Milly smiled unheeding, but Louis put in his word, frowning—"St. Leonards is not a place to strengthen everybody, I am sure."

Then tea was announced—not playful five o'clock tea, but the serious meal served in the morning room instead of dinner. Milly went to carry Louis's tray to him as usual. She waited upon him in a soft, deft way, arranging what he wanted on the little table beside him, coming and going like the summer air. She did not speak as she performed her little offices to-night; happily a great deal of life's business may be performed mechanically, without our knowing exactly that we are doing it.

"Milly," said Louis, suddenly, "what are you thinking about?"

She started and turned red, fancying that she had made some mistake; then, seeing his eyes fixed upon her, her cheeks flamed so hotly that she was fain to cover them with her hands.

"What do you mean, Louis? Don't stare so, you rude boy."

"I only meant to ask where your thoughts are, you seem so absent to-night;" and he drew down one of the hands, which was hot and trembling, and held it in his own.

"I am not thinking of anything," she said, with a little laugh.

"And you are letting your tea stand, till my thoughts about that are that it will get cold, and you won't like it, Louis."

"Deep subject of contemplation," he said, smiling.

"You know I'm not fond of deep subjects," said Milly, in an odd, fluttered way; "you know you always despised me for not understanding them."

"I despise you, Milly! You know I think more of you than of anybody in the world."

This rather strong statement made Milly stare; decidedly Louis was as unreal as everything else to-day; she could only look at him in astonishment, and then leave him to his tea. She did not go back

to him afterwards, for Mr. Oakley was coming to read with him. Louis sent word that Attie must come and share his lesson, and the others remained in the morning room.

Mildred took some work and sat down by the fire; Prissie drew a stool to her feet, and, sprawling over the hearth-rug in an attitude only possible to this young lady, resigned herself to the music of the *Lady of the Lake.* For Prissie was one of those girls whose romantic hearts and heads are cruelly satirised by their unromantic exterior.

Mrs. Robarts, for once, did not order her daughter out of her awkward position; the mother was too much absorbed in thought to notice it. It appeared that Milly's health was the subject of her reflections, for the girl was presently caressed again, and told this time that she looked flushed. Indeed her cheeks were rosier than usual, and her eyes brighter, as she bent over her work.

Mrs. Robarts sighed softly, rustled across the room, and sat down once more to write letters. She was a great correspondent, and used to spend whole mornings writing to people for whom she did not care in the least, and for whom she expressed the kindest interest. It would seem as if this sort of falsehood-writing must be a dreary task, but it was one of which Mrs. Robarts never wearied apparently.

This evening, however, her letter was to Mrs. Braithwaite, and it seemed to take more thought than usual before her pen flew with its customary rapidity over the thick, smooth paper.

"My dearest Marion," said the letter, "I know you will be anxious to hear by every post of your dear children; and though I am not able to report quite as favourably as I could wish, I am sure you will prefer candid news to any varnished statements. You are not to be anxious if I tell you that our dear Milly looks a little pale, seems a little depressed, and would, I think, be the better of a little sea-air. What do you say to that? You know she would not disturb the quiet the doctor enjoins. As to Attie, she is in the best possible health and spirits. We have been very quiet, only an unexpected visitor to-day in the person of Sir Arthur Marston," &c.

Milly worked on, unsuspecting what kind attention was being paid to the colour of her cheeks; and Prissie, lost in another sort of dream, was pressing the heather with James Fitzjames.

Was Mrs. Robarts far removed from all dreams and romances of her own? She looked like the soft guardian angel of these young lives, planning only what was best for them. She had been heroine of a drama once, you might have thought; and though handsome enough to act that part still, she would

now content herself with a subordinate *rôle*, and leave the best for the new-comers.

But such self-sacrifice is not natural to all hearts. Mrs. Robarts may not have found her own drama so exciting that the bare recollection of it could satisfy the rest of her life. Now it seemed to her as if it would be pleasant to be the foremost personage once more—to resume the heroine's robes, and receive the loud burst of applause again. That was surely more satisfying than just dressing and painting up these younger creatures, and standing drearily in the background to hear their triumph. Mrs. Robarts glanced at the mirror, and the mirror whispered softly that the Queen here was much handsomer than little Snow-white.

So Mrs. Robarts *felt;* she did not think it. Thoughts will make words of themselves, while feelings have no need of such coarse embodiments. We dare not think all we feel. She wrote her kind letter, assured that it was for Mildred's good, never owning to herself that this child she was tending so kindly was a rival to be dismissed.

As to little Snow-white herself, was she not always blind, even to the verge of stupidity, respecting the Queen's devices? Little Snow-white Mildred got up presently, and went to the window to see the night: it looked just the reverse of the

day, she thought; then the ground was all sparkles, now it was the sky. As she looked, some one came out of the house, and walked quickly down the crisp garden path.

Mr. Oakley had finished his lesson, and was going away, of course. And Milly hardly noticed him; he had nothing to do with the dream that was filling the shining sky with strange influences for her. And yet, as he walked, something of the same influences were working in his mind.

How bright, how clever this girl, this Beatrice was, he thought. What a fascination there was in the clear, fearless eyes; what a delightfully absurd way she had of expressing her understanding of difficult matters. He remembered, when Alice was alive—poor, pretty Alice!—how he would laugh sometimes, when he was teaching her, over the mistakes she made. But Beatrice did not make those dear little girlish mistakes; she was cleverer—she was wonderfully clever. Then suddenly his mind made a jump to calculating how much he would have, or rather how little, if he gave up his fellowship. The calculation was not encouraging, and he proceeded to abuse himself for his folly in thinking of such things.

"A fine suitor I am!" he thought; "a fine cavalier!"

And he whistled a tune to get rid of his thoughts,

or rather of the one thought of his girl-pupil. Is it not that one thought which we try to whistle away, the one that is always haunting us? Constantly it presents itself in all sorts of disguises, coming upon us like an active supernumerary at a theatre short of actors—who now glides on as a ghost, now strides on as a robber, now marches before us proudly as the attendant of a king.

Mr. Oakley had never had such a thought before. He had persuaded himself that all domestic joys were over for him, and it was startling all at once to turn a corner of the road and find the promise of something better and brighter than he had ever known before. This thought now sat beside his bed, and woke him whispering in the morning; it fluttered, butterfly-like, over the heads of his boys in school, and sang to him in the wind's voices. He was always looking forward to the hour of returning to the Braithwaites', and perhaps having *her* beside him again.

Attie the while was eloquent with his praises, and delighted with his eager wish to help her. Mrs. Robarts did not heed it at all; she was occupied with another thought—how would that matter turn out? what would Mrs. Braithwaite say to her letter?

Indeed, when the letter came, Mrs. Braithwaite did not know what to say; she joined the idea of Milly's

depression with Sir Arthur's visit in the most suggestive manner; she could hardly doubt that Mrs. Robarts had meant her so to do. "She must have done so," thought the mother. But how about leaving Milly there? It would be better to have both the girls down; but Attie was an unquiet element, and perfect tranquillity was still most desirable. Then the landlady said she should not have another room at liberty for ten days, and Mrs. Braithwaite didn't wish to have to move Lily.

"I had better let things remain as they are for ten days," she thought. "Much cannot happen in ten days."

Why Mrs. Braithwaite thought much could not happen in ten days cannot be explained, some very important events having contrived to happen even in a shorter space of time; perhaps she thought so because she wished to think it. At any rate, she wrote off to Mrs. Robarts, saying she thought Milly had better join them in the following week, spending Christmas-day at home.

Milly was very much surprised at the message, but she said nothing about it, and the ten days seemed determined to contradict Mrs. Braithwaite if they could. Sir Arthur came often, being talked to openly by Mrs. Robarts, but stealing private words with Milly. Louis saw both—saw through both, it

may be said—and writhed under it with a rage and pain known only to himself. He was nearly always irritable now, except in those hours when he and Mr. Oakley and Beatrice studied together. In spite of her preoccupation, it certainly did begin to dawn upon Mrs. Robarts that those hours were sometimes prolonged, and that Beatrice's presence had better be dispensed with. She doubted about suggesting a change, however, for fear of vexing Louis, till what she observed one afternoon stirred her up to a stricter view.

The lesson was over, and they had fallen into one of the talks common to them in these careless days; they happened to be speaking of Achilles, who was admired by Mr. Oakley, and not much respected by Beatrice.

"He is too demonstrative for a hero, to my fancy," she said. "My idea of a hero is of some restrained strength; these excitable people do not seem to me heroic."

Louis began to laugh, which made Mr. Oakley colour and feel uncomfortable, though he was tolerably sure that Beatrice would not mind.

"I knew you would laugh when I said it," she went on. "But I don't want to be heroic myself; I was only thinking of other people."

"So I presume."

"And to be a hero, I think, you must be reserved."

"I think," said Mr. Oakley, "that those notions about 'all that glitters is not gold,' and 'all gold glitters not,' may be carried too far. If the choice lay between gold that glittered and gold that glittered not, I should certainly choose the first. It would have the same value, and the beauty of glittering into the bargain."

Mr. Oakley was at ease with her now, and Attie fought the battle of reserve, and he of unreserve, modestly supporting the qualities they had not themselves. It was then that Mrs. Robarts came in, with the usual rustle and flow of silk; she began to smile sweetly on the party, and ended by reminding Mr. Oakley how near Christmas was, and how selfish she had been in not insisting on his holiday. In short, she was extremely kind; but she turned him out of the house.

"My dear boy, the poor man must have a holiday; it is Christmas-time," was her answer to Louis.

Indeed that festival was drawing near; the girls were engaged preparing decorations for the church. Mrs. Braithwaite's evergreens were, as usual, ruthlessly plundered; while Mrs. Robarts told them so sweetly they were welcome to strip her few poor trees, that her small contribution excited a disproportionate amount of gratitude.

The bright frosty weather had given place again to mist and mud; but, nothing daunted, the young people were ready with thick gloves, baskets, scissors, and string to go down and begin putting up their decorations in the church itself, the day before Christmas Eve.

"Thinking yourselves so good too," said Louis, laughing at them, as they stood round his sofa wishing him good-bye, "when you know you are charmed to find such an opportunity for combining piety with waste of time."

"All right," said Attie. "Let us hear all the abuse before we go."

"No; I shall keep some for you when you come back."

They went off; but Milly's eyes rested wistfully on Louis as she moved towards the door, and, while the others went downstairs, she stole back to his side. It was painful to the poor child to do even what she felt to be right if a friend condemned it.

"You do not really mind?" she whispered, pleadingly.

Louis looked up, smiling; it was such a pretty face, as the brown eyes shone under a plumy hat—such a picturesque figure standing there, in soft sealskin and blue serge, with a basket on its arm—that he thought of that first, not of the question.

"No," he said at length. "If you think it right, I am sure it must be, Milly."

She blushed and smiled in her pretty way, and then Attie called her loudly from below, and she had to run away. Louis sighed, and turned his head wearily. What part had he in their bright young life? He lay brooding over that question long after they had picked their way through the mud and joined the other workers. While they were hard at work, and the wreaths were growing under their hands, he lay still brooding, brooding.

The girls did not return home till it was too dark to see any longer; stiff, then, and cold, with pinched fingers, aching backs, and a general impression of evergeen scents everywhere, they made their way out into the church porch. The evening was dull and misty, and they peered about a little before they discovered their servant, touching his hat in the twilight, and extremely ready to start homewards again. That was their expected attendant, but an unexpected one walked into the porch at that moment, and performed the extremely ceremonious bow belonging only to Sir Arthur Marston.

Attie hardly checked a shrug, Milly coloured crimson, Prissie really did make a face at him; but, happily, such demonstrations were invisible at this season out of doors at five o'clock. Sir Arthur came

forward in a very decided manner, took Milly's basket from her, and offered her his arm.

He felt that it was very good of him to be there; it was late, the road was muddy, and he was running a risk of catching cold. He was quite old enough to be conscious of that risk, and to remember how disagreeable it was; and he would have much preferred an interview in a warm room. But that seemed hard to get, and he would not write her a letter to offer himself to her; he could talk better than he could write, he thought. Besides, she might think a twilight walk more romantic. He wished to please Milly, and had no doubt he should succeed; it was his duty to his ancient home to marry now, though personally he might have preferred his present freedom.

He was not a man of deep emotions, but he was capable of very fixed impressions, and he was under the impression that he had been faithful to his old love all these years—a difficult matter. It is very difficult to make a funeral train of all the days that follow a day of tragedy—to make them all mourners, with their faces turned only to a grave. The first ones, which are in sight of the coffin, will indeed be weeping sadly in their black robes. But there will come some holding white pocket-handkerchiefs before dry eyes; and then indifferent days will follow, which cannot see the coffin at all. You may give

them black robes, but they will smile and talk about many things, and put their handkerchiefs in their pockets, and forget all about the funeral. At least that is the way with commonplace people, and Sir Arthur was very commonplace, though he resisted the fact, and petted his obstinacy, believing it to be steadfastness of purpose.

Only now he had condescended a little to fate: he must marry, and this young lady was so charming, she would make quite a pleasure of that duty. He had taken a great fancy to her; he liked the shy deference with which she treated him; he felt sure he he could soon form her into all his wife should be. He did not understand Milly's general deference to her fellow-creatures, and believed himself the only idol at her little shrine.

"I bring you the latest news from St. Leonards, I flatter myself," so he began, not at all embarrassed, but knowing all he meant to say. It is often the case that the less we have to express the easier the power of expression comes.

"I was at St. Leonards yesterday, and Mrs. Braithwaite gave me a most excellent report of her patient."

"You were at St. Leonards yesterday!" Milly repeated, as if it were the most incredible thing in the world.

"Yes, indeed; and will not you ask me why I went there? I assure you it concerns you too."

Milly gave a little gasp of wonder.

"I went down to see Mrs. Braithwaite, and to beg her permission to speak to you on a subject very near my heart. And the permission was given me; so I am going to take courage and speak now."

The twilight, grey with the creeping mist, grew confused all at once—flashes were coming and going in it everywhere, and all the bright little strangenesses and surprises came falling back upon her like a shower of fireworks, bewildering her with many colours.

She had often heard and wondered at magnificent tales of love in romance, and the splendour of the heroine to whom the tale was told; and behold, all at once, here was the tale itself being told to her.

## CHAP. IX.—CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS.

SIR ARTHUR had had to tell the tale before, as he intimated to Milly. The visit had been something between a great trouble and a great relief to Mrs. Braithwaite. She had been very anxious after her friend's letter, interpreting it to the effect that Milly was a silly little thing, making herself unhappy about nothing at all. Sir Arthur's tale relieved her of that vexatious thought; but there came others. Milly was a mere child; how could she know yet what was for her happiness? How could she be sure of not repenting afterwards? And the difference in their ages was so very great.

But then the man was a good man, as she believed, and a fatherly protector would be very good for Milly; his worldly position was desirable too, though Mrs. Braithwaite thought as little as might be about that. And then, supposing the child was really unhappy about him?

Mrs. Braithwaite fell back upon her usual resource, that had no ingenuity in it—she simply told the

truth. She suggested to Sir Arthur that Milly was but a child; he might speak to her if he would, but if any engagement were entered into, it must only be considered conditional for a year. So, with "thanks for his good opinion," she sent the lover on his mission, and returned to her patient, anxious, and wishing herself in two places at once.

Lily was much worse for the "excitement" of Sir Arthur's coming—so much worse that the doctor insisted on perfect quiet again, and would not sanction the further excitement of the sisters' visit at present. So poor Mrs. Braithwaite had simply to become nurse again, and leave the lover to manage his own cause.

He was managing it to the best of his ability, as he guided Mildred through the muddy road, with the mist creeping ghost-like around them.

"I am very unfortunate, very awkward," he said, in that lowered, confidential voice of his, but with the conventional tone he could not get rid of, "if I have not succeeded in showing you a little how much in earnest I was in trying to gain your good opinion. That I should succeed is perhaps too presumptuous a hope; but my efforts have at least been very heartfelt, very sincere. You will believe that at any rate, will you not?"

"Oh, why should you care?" faltered Milly.

"Because it is such a life-and-death question with me—because it is the question on which all my future happiness depends. It is bright morning in your life; in mine, afternoon shadows are falling. I have seen and suffered a good deal in the world, and with you all is bright and fresh. Do you feel as if that precluded any sympathy between us? Do you feel startled and displeased when I say that I love you—when I ask permission to place myself at your feet?"

When Sir Arthur said he had "seen and suffered much," he thought it was true; but, in fact, it was rather that he had had opportunities of seeing and suffering. Really to see, really to suffer, required some faculties which he had not; but how can the heart perceive the absence of powers it has never known?

Milly was very much frightened; she did not at all understand the importance of what she must say next; but she had a confused feeling that she could not withhold from this man that for which he was pleading so earnestly. And yet what was the truth? what could she give him? The quick wish came that she had her mother to run to, and her only reply was a little sob.

"I would not distress you for worlds," said the gentleman to the sob. "If you are displeased at my

presumption, command me to be silent, and, hard as it will be, I will obey."

"Oh, please, don't talk about presumption," gasped Milly. "And did mamma know—did mamma say ——" She could not get on.

"Mrs. Braithwaite gave me leave to tell you what I had told her—what I am trying to tell you now. Will you not listen to me kindly? Will you send me away to be hopeless?"

"Oh no, no," said Milly. "You are—you are very kind. I wish—oh! I don't know what I wish."

"You do not wish me to leave you, Mildred?" he said, taking her hand; for he thought in his own mind that she was very fond of him, and did not know how to tell him so. "You do not mean to send me away?"

How often the words haunted her afterwards in the low, unsympathetic voice! How often she answered them in her thoughts—not as she answered now, with a soft, whispered "No," which encouraged him to press her hand more closely.

"Then I may hope? I may look forward to happiness again—to sunshine such as only you can give me?"

And Mildred did not say he might not—indeed she did not know then that she had no sunshine to give him; and he talked on in gratitude and happi-

ness, in affectionate protection, all in the same low, dull tones. And so, when they got to the garden gate, Mildred found she was "engaged," and he stopped there to draw something from his pocket.

"I have been faithful before; I will be faithful now," he said. "I have worn this near my heart for ten years. May I place it on your finger?"

She let him slip it on, and when he pressed her hand afterwards the diamonds in the ring hurt her finger; she had never worn such an ornament before, and now she was betrothed with a dead woman's ring. She did not speak, but a foolish shudder passed over her at the thought of hands cold and dead that could claim back that ring from her; as she stood silent, he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it ceremoniously. Then she said "Good night" in a trembling voice, and fled into the house, up to her own room, where a lamp was burning dimly, yet not so dimly but that she could see the sparkling of the diamonds on her finger. After looking at them for a moment she crouched down in a low chair, clasped her hands before her face, and tried to think. What—what had she done? What wonderful thing had come into her life? She had promised something, everything—laid herself under some new and awful obligations. But what were they? She tried to think, and, as she tried, her mind cleared a little.

All that strange brightness, those gleamings and possibilities of incomprehensible happiness that this man's words had brought into her life, seemed all to vanish now that the whisperings of fate had changed into the pleadings she had heard to-night — the pleadings, strong in word and weak in tone, which she had not been able to resist.

Did she wish she had resisted them? No, no; she was not so weak, so wicked. He was very good to her; he loved her very dearly; and she was going to repay him goodness for goodness, love for love. By-and-by it would seem more natural; she should find the right place in her mind, so to speak, and go on reading her thoughts out of all this confusion.

She was not left long to muse, for Attie's foot-step was heard on the stairs, and in a moment she ran in, threw her arms round her sister, and called to her, "Oh, Milly, Milly! what have you done?" and both girls clung together, crying and kissing, till another tread disturbed them, and Marion came in. She was to spend the evening with them and say good-bye; she was going to spend Christmas with some relations of her husband's in the North.

She imagined that Mildred was in Paradise, as she had been, and she soothed her in a gentle, wise manner, and calmed her and Attie too before she took them downstairs. And the while Mrs. Robarts

was sitting in her room thinking over a letter she had received that afternoon; it was from Mrs. Braithwaite, telling of Sir Arthur's visit to her, and the result.

Mrs. Robarts frowned on the letter, and let herself look more middle-aged than she ever allowed in company. This child preferred to such a position! The fancy she herself had allowed to lie glittering in her mind so long, turned to such a hollow mockery! Mrs. Robarts was not deeply moved, but she felt a pang of vexation and disappointment to which she had long been a stranger. There was no heroic emotion about it, only she felt cross as she crushed the letter back into her pocket, and sat there frowning and thinking.

Presently she rose and went to her looking-glass; she noticed lines round her mouth and on her forehead, a fixed colour in her cheeks; her soft brown hair was the least bit ruffled, and a grey streak showed itself there. There was something very chilly to her in that sight.

The skeleton in the cupboard is a terrible thing, but what is it compared to the skeleton in *us*, sending forth its awful warning, "I am here behind your beauty, and soon I shall be all. The flesh shall shrink towards me, and I shall look out plainer and plainer, and then I shall be all."

That voice made itself heard by Mrs. Robarts that night, and she trembled. The loved, cherished beauty going, and the power of calling up a look of interest in the eyes that met hers; pity instead of sympathy; how should she bear it? The mirror was offering a little antidote for the poison which had been too sweet, but Mrs. Robarts turned away from the bitterness. To be sure, many a time words holy and true, as to how the "fashion of this world passeth away," had sounded in her ears; many a time also she had heard of a treasure laid up where loss could not come; she had even quoted these sayings for the consolation of other people; but they were mere words to her, the "hanging robe and vacant ornament" of thought—matters of course, from which she gained as much real comfort as a heathen might. There is not much consolation in mechanical Christianity.

But a deeper wound than any Mrs. Robarts could feel on the subject was inflicted on another who heard those tidings. She had shown Mrs. Braithwaite's letter to her son, who had returned it without a word, and then lay quite still till Prissie rushed in to tell of the wonders she had seen. She thought he was asleep, but it was impossible to respect his slumbers with such a piece of news to tell, and she began—"Louis! Louis! are you awake?"

No answer.

"Louis, dear, what do you think? Attie says she believes Milly is engaged to Sir Arthur Marston."

Still no answer.

"Only fancy, Louis. And he is so old too! I am so sorry, and so is Attie. Dear, darling Milly! She is the greatest pet in the world; isn't she, Louis?"

Then her brother twisted himself round with intense irritation, and shouted at her in a voice of rage—

"If you've quite done bellowing at me, you had better go upstairs."

Prissie started. That Louis should be cross for nothing was unhappily no new phenomenon; but that he should refuse to be interested in Milly was very strange. Prissie could not make it out at all.

"But, Louis," she began again.

"Can't you go?" repeated Louis, furiously. "What do you come bothering me for, you chattering idiot? You're always in the way—always saying the wrong thing."

Prissie, accustomed to be scolded for nothing, and to be the person who saw the wrong side of her mother's silken manners, was not particularly disconcerted; but, as her brother continued to abuse her and order her off, she good-humouredly retreated. She certainly did bang the door, so as to wake vibra-

tions in all the china and piano, and in Louis too; but that was done from mere force of habit, not from any malice.

When she was gone he tossed himself round on his couch again, and once more lay still, with his hand before his eyes, till his next visitor disturbed him in the person of his mother.

"My dearest boy," said she, coming up to him ever so softly, "are you asleep?"

The calm gracefulness, the sweet looks, had all come back; the hair and brow smoothed once more, the disappointment trampled on.

Mrs. Robarts had rallied again, though it was but an hour since she had been standing, looking so forlorn, before her glass. Middle-age can rally more quickly than youth, where it rallies at all.

"No, I am not asleep," he answered, rather sullenly.

"We are late to-night; your aunt's letter put time out of my head, and then the girls ran in in great excitement. Poor little Milly! she really considers herself engaged to Sir Arthur. Poor little dear! I hope it will be for her happiness."

"Do you doubt it, mother? Sir Arthur is so well-behaved, and so rich."

The tone was very bitter—not more so perhaps than hers was, mentally; but she had acquired such a

habit of sugaring her little utterances, that it was only by their excessive sweetness you could guess how bitter they would have been. Louis guessed, as usual, more than was good for him.

"You have congratulated Milly?" he asked.

"I have tried to do so, dear child. You see your aunt tells me she will not consent to an actual engagement, only to a conditional year's trial. Such arrangements are so awkward—such impossibilities—positively I don't know what to say. And then, poor little dear! she evidently regards it as an engagement pure and simple. I hope it is all right, but it certainly is not such a romance as dear Marion's."

"And you like romances, mother."

"And my naughty boy laughs at me! At any rate, I can selfishly enjoy being off duty, I have had such hard work lately throwing myself into conversational gulfs to try and entertain him, and finding him more unamusable than Louis XIV."

A pang of hot indignation—indignation and pain almost to madness—darted through Louis; one of those forked lightnings of fury that will sometimes flash through a poor overwrought human creature. He knew—he *knew* the man would not have been "unamusable" under certain circumstances. He read the secret of the sweetly superior tone, the graceful

retreat; and he hated the secret only a little less than himself for discovering it.

He made no answer, however; and as Mrs. Robarts began to find out that she was vexing him—at any rate, that he was vexed—she did not pursue the subject.

"You will be bored with these romances, my poor Louis," she said. "Let me hasten back to the details of everyday life, and make your tea."

"Thank you." He did not look at her, nor answer the caress with which she sailed away, past the servant who was bringing in his lamp. Louis did not use the light; he fell back into his own thoughts, and did not move till a new visitor roused him, who came blushing in carrying a tray. Milly always would be his waiting-maid when she could, and he knew who it was making the gentle noiseless arrangements on the table beside him, though he did not look at her.

Prissie had prepared Mildred to find Louis "very cross," so she was not astonished at getting nothing but a constrained "thank you" for her pains, and she said nothing till she had ended her ministrations, then softly asked, "Can I get you anything else, Louis dear?"

At that he turned towards her and looked up, but only at her hair, not her face, and answered, "No,

thank you; I am sorry to give you so much trouble," in such a constrained voice, that all the tone seemed squeezed out of it.

"Trouble!" said Milly. "How can you talk about trouble? I'm your cousin, you know."

"I beg your pardon; we are really not in any way related; and now that I hear you are betrothed to such a magnate as Sir Arthur Marston, I feel that it is not right for you to be waiting upon me. By the way, let me offer my congratulations."

Milly felt hurt; the tone was so hard and bitter she could not answer with a laugh.

"Don't talk so, Louis dear," she pleaded, kneeling down by the sofa, as she often did, and putting a hand on his. "Whatever happens, you will always be my brother, you know. Now will you not, Louis?"

The hand she touched shook a little at that appeal, and his lips quivered as he smiled and said more naturally—

"As you please, Milly; I shall be proud of the title. But you'll have to consult my brother-in-law."

She blushed and sprang to her feet.

"Don't talk nonsense, sir, and eat your tea. I shall begin to be quite dictatorial if you go on in this ridiculous way;" and she ran away laughing.

But why did she feel so troubled all the while?

why had she that feeling of pain—of pity for herself and Louis?

She wondered if Marion had felt so, but she could not get courage to ask her.

"It will be all right by-and-by," said Mildred to herself. "It is like a new life—like being somebody else. No wonder I feel uncomfortable, if it is better than the old. I dare say the souls feel rather forlorn and strange at first in Paradise—just at first, because of its being such a new life."

So she tried to persuade herself that she also was in Paradise.

"Do people ever take off engagement rings?" said Milly, softly, that night. She had let down her wavy brown hair, and stood hesitating, with her brush in hand, looking down doubtfully at the diamonds.

"It hurts my finger so; shall I take it off or not?"

"Why not?" asked Attie, practically. "Let me see it." Mildred did not move.

"A ring! No beginning and no end. It means for ever and ever, doesn't it, Attie?"

"So they say," returned the sister, with rather wondering eyes.

"For ever and ever! for ever and ever!" Milly repeated dreamily, and something like a shudder passed over her.

"Oh, Attie! how dare any one promise to be faithful for ever? What have I done?"

The words came from her like a cry of terror, and brought Attie to her side in a fright too.

"Nothing, Milly. If it was a mistake you can say so, or ask for a little more time to make up your mind."

"Hush! hush! Attie; what are you talking of? You don't understand; it's all right. Look here."

She slipped the ring from her finger, put it into her sister's hand, and began vigorously brushing her hair.

"But, Milly dear," Attie persisted, still alarmed; "if you are not quite sure, do tell him to wait till mother comes home, till you can talk to her about it."

"No—nonsense; I was only silly." She laughed a little, and held out her hand. "It's gone, you see. I am not engaged now."

Attie had never known her sister so odd before, but then such an odd thing had never happened to her. Beatrice could hardly imagine how it must feel to be engaged to Sir Arthur Marston. Yet it could not seem so terrible to Milly, or why had she accepted him? And indeed there was no particular reason for that consent, except that Mildred had felt as if she could not help it. The ring stayed on the dressing-

table till next morning, and when she replaced it on her finger she laughed and sighed.

The time had not yet come when the depths of her nature were stirred, to teach her how deeply she could feel. She was confused—not exactly unhappy, but anxious and puzzled. She did not really know the man she had promised to marry; her veiled prophet had not looked upon her yet; and she was prepared to worship him if he only showed a decent amount of majesty. She had no exact ideal of the face she wished to find behind the veil; she was prepared to receive the revelation as a fulfilment of what her ideal ought to have been, and to accept the satisfaction as the lawful measurement of her desires. And all the while there was another heart more deeply moved about her fate than her own had learned to be yet, or than her prophet's was capable of being. Louis felt that he had entered upon very dark days. He had been living in a sort of frenzy of study, rending out the secrets of the past, and half-maddened with striving after the higher sources to which Mr. Oakley had pointed him. Hour after hour, through the grim winter night, he would be poring over his books, and thinking with all his might.

All the house was asleep, and the strange noises that haunt the dark hours—the creaking, the clock-ticking, the whispers of the wind—passed by him

unheeded. The slow dim watches of the night brought him strange revelations, thoughts, terrors. He placed himself before the awful mysteries of being, of life, of death; his mind went groping through the darkness, striving to make a way up into the serene light where shines the glory of God. Sometimes flashes of truth darted past him; he had glimpses of the divine Presence; he fell down for a moment before the awful necessity of truth, and the cry rose up from within him, "I believe!" But then the darkness closed again over his head like the sea.

Is there any struggle more fearful than that of a human soul, with no firm resting-place beneath it, striving for some footing in the depths of darkness—sinking, drowning, stifling in the realms of shadows—the awful future pressing nearer and nearer, the echoes of heaven dying ever farther and farther away?

Louis had to learn this bitterness; it was his penance for doubt lightly cherished, for old truths scorned. And then the deepest feelings of his heart were tortured too; he could not, in his weakness, show himself as a rival of Sir Arthur Marston, and yet he felt instinctively a power of loving and protecting which that man had not. He loved Milly with all the terrible intensity of his nature, and he was powerless, as he thought, to help or to hold her.

His mother too—his love for her was made a pain in these days.

The outer and the inner life seemed equally to force upon him a suffering and a struggle beyond his strength. And outwardly the poor wrenched nerves could find no expression but in the pitiful ill-humour of which he himself was ashamed, which gave him new pain in the patience of others. They only *pitied* him, he felt.

This night, the night after Milly's engagement, seemed the worst of all—the burden that must be borne without the possibility of escape. He was exhausted, but sleep would not come.

"I must let Dr. Gordon look at you, my dearest boy," said his mother, when the long misery of the dark hours was over, and a whole lifetime of thought and misery seemed to have passed since her "good night" had sounded so mockingly in his ears. He had dragged himself downstairs, but there was no concealing his worn-out looks.

"Dr. Gordon is an old woman, and no good. I am all right, thank you."

"My dear boy! And you cannot touch your breakfast, and you look like a ghost!"

"I never touch anything under inspection. Pray go and have yours. If Dr. Gordon was in the house I should not see him."

Poor Mrs. Robarts went away, as she knew from experience that Louis was more unmanageable in her hands than in anybody's; but she felt very anxious about him.

The girls would be out again to-day, Christmas-eve, finishing the work in the church; and it would be a good opportunity, while Beatrice was out, to ask Mr. Oakley to come and see Louis. No one knew better than Mrs. Robarts how to put away people when you do not want them, and take them out again when you can make use of them. She would do this without the smallest remorse, and in the most graceful manner possible; and she settled with herself to take Mr. Oakley out again to-day. With that resolution she betook herself to her own room, for disappointment and anxiety, though coming to her in a somewhat modified form, had given her a headache, and she wished for quiet.

The girls, finding Louis speechless, returned to their workroom, and went on putting the last stroke to their Christmas devices. They were very busy, laughing and talking, Milly joining in, and wondering the while why to-day should be so unlike yesterday. Louis tried to read, but the words had no meaning for him; for once his mind asserted its own right to break down under its intolerable burden. He was shutting his eyes, and trying to forget

himself for a while in sleep, when the door opened, and Woodward solemnly announced "Sir Arthur Marston!"

By the freemasonry peculiar to servants, Woodward knew quite well that Sir Arthur was Miss Mildred's intended, and calmly adopted him as one of the family.

Louis flushed, pulled himself up as well as he could, while Sir Arthur shook hands with him in a particularly bland manner, that set Louis's teeth on edge at once.

"I am an early visitor," said the gentleman. "I hoped for the pleasure of escorting the ladies down to the church again."

"Yes; they will be going directly," Louis said, and he rang the bell to have the ladies summoned.

Then Sir Arthur began to speak of the weather, and Louis answered never a word.

## CHAP. X.—A DIAMOND RING.

THE consciousness on Sir Arthur's part that he ought to be congratulated, and on Louis's part that he ought to congratulate, made cowards of them both.

"The roads are in a dreadful state," said Sir Arthur presently, walking to the window. Louis gave a kind of grunt.

"It's better, however, than the frost for the ladies' work, no doubt," he went on.

"Why?" said Louis.

"The cold is an enemy to both delicate plants—the ladies and 'that they work in.'" Sir Arthur smiled affably.

"Oh!" answered the other, anything but affably.

It struck Sir Arthur that this young man was very ill-bred, but an invalid must be excused.

Is there a subtlety of feeling that makes aversions mutual? or is it only that aversion betrayed by eye or tone on one side kindles the same feeling on the other? In one way or other dislikes are generally

dual; and unrequited hate is rarer than unrequited love.

It certainly was so here: but Sir Arthur was far above showing what he felt; he became only a little more civil.

"I am delighted at the effect they are producing in the church," he continued. "It needs a little colour, you know."

"I can't say I do know, as I never go there."

"It would be too fatiguing for you, no doubt. You will be more equal to it by-and-by, we hope."

"I don't know that I hope it," returned Louis, morosely. Sir Arthur looked at him a little.

"One gets used to these deprivations, of course," he continued presently. "I know, when they would not let me smoke for six months, I got so used to it I didn't care for a cigar when I could get one."

"The parallel is exact, no doubt, between a sermon and a cigar," muttered Louis; and Sir Arthur was glad to see the door open, not only because Mildred was coming in. He went to meet her, and took her hand with such an air of possession of her that Louis turned away impatiently.

Milly blushed and smiled, and Sir Arthur thought how fond she was of him, how pleased to see him. The thought smoothed the wrinkles that Louis had called up upon his forehead.

"May I be allowed to escort you to your beautiful work?" he asked, and she answered breathlessly—

"Thank you."

"I cannot tell you how proud a privilege it is to be allowed my share in your sacred mission."

"We have almost finished," faltered Milly, instinctively dreading some sneer from Louis, who was indeed sneering with all his might from his sofa.

"Not many more holy knots to tie, or sacred string to cut with saintly scissors," he said.

Nothing made him worse than conventional reverence, and Sir Arthur had a special right to annoy him. Mildred coloured, and felt that Louis would not be good; they had better go away quickly.

"Will you come into our workroom?" she suggested, hesitatingly; and once more it darted through Sir Arthur's mind how fond she was of him; such a sweet girl, and of such good taste. Of course he would be too happy, and they went out together, Milly sending across to Louis a little plaintive, imploring look, which he tried not to meet.

Outside the door Mildred stopped, and gave another look of the same kind at her companion.

"Please," she began, and he bent his head to listen to her with an air of protecting attention, which was pleasant perhaps, but embarrassing certainly.

"If you would not mind——" She stopped short.

"I shouldn't mind anything you told me not to mind," he answered, smiling.

"It's Louis; he's ill, and often seems cross to strangers; but, please, don't mind it."

"I do not mean to be a stranger, or to mind anything that Louis may please to do, unless he troubles you; I cannot promise to forgive anybody that."

Such a pleasant, kind, gentlemanly tone and smile he bestowed upon her; how was it that Milly's heart swelled into a feeling scarcely known before—a feeling of revolt against one who was speaking gently to her? What business had this man to come between her and Louis? Then she remembered that he had a right now to come between her and any one; she had given herself to him; it all passed through her mind in one flash of thought, giving new light to her eyes and colour to her cheeks. But she made no answer.

"I like that passage so much in Tennyson's *Idylls*," he said, "where it is said that scorn was forbidden to all who were sound in body, but for a sufferer scorn was allowed as part of his defect."

Mildred started, and again a whole torrent of feeling rushed over her in a moment. Louis to be pitied, patronised, half-contemptuously! Louis, so much cleverer, loftier than any one else she knew!

yes, than any one else, she repeated to herself rebelliously.

But the outer self only gave a little shivering sigh, and turned from him; the words seemed to have gone through her, and she carried the dart away with her. Those words had pierced another listener too. Louis, in his nervous state, was preternaturally sharp of hearing; the low tones would come to him, though he tried to avoid them; and Sir Arthur's magnanimous quotation hit him so cruelly that he turned white and breathed hard under it. He could not shake off the impression any more than Mildred could; and, with that other pain and weariness, he found his burden almost too heavy to bear that morning; or, so it seemed, as if there were a choice about laying such burdens down—as if their irrevocable nature, that we must bear them however they may crush us, were not a part of their heaviest weight.

"My dear boy," said Mrs. Robarts, gliding in, "you must take some lunch; you had no breakfast. I daresay Mr. Oakley will come and see you by-and-by."

"You told him not to come again," answered Louis, monotonously.

"I certainly suggested to him that he might give himself a little holiday," smiled the mother. "But

I sent him a little note this morning, because I thought you were not very well, and a visit from him would cheer you up."

Louis laughed, not pleasantly; the laugh was no more mirthful than a sob.

"An unnecessary trouble," he said; but she felt glad that she had done so; the boy had never looked so ill before, she thought. Was the Paul and Virginia attachment stronger than she had supposed?

Meanwhile her note had reached Mr. Oakley.

"It is too bad," said the note, kindly and candidly, "to beg you to take a holiday, and then to interrupt it again. But you will excuse a mother's selfishness; it is my anxiety for my dear boy that prompts me. He looks very ill; and I think he would open his heart to his friend rather than to his mother. If it is not without a pang that I own this, it is at least with gratitude, unspoilt by jealousy. Your kindness has made a great impression on Louis. He will own to you what his suffering is, though he will not tell his mother. So do come and see him at once, Mr. Oakley, and relieve the anxiety of yours faithfully, P. Robarts."

Mr. Oakley smiled. "Why was she always thinking it necessary to say how fond she was of her children?" he asked himself; "did she think people would doubt it? And she put me away, and now

takes me out again; did she think I was a tool that might hurt anybody?"

Mr. Oakley thought he should hurt nobody but himself; at any rate, he would do Mrs. Robarts' bidding, and what he wished himself, perhaps. He would see Louis, and some one else, it might be: no good thinking of that, but then there was no harm.

Replying thus to himself, Mr. Oakley had already accepted Mrs. Robarts' invitation by starting at once for the Braithwaites'. He arrived before even the anxious mother thought it possible; and, while thanking him, she also took note of his speed, and congratulated herself in that Attie was out of the way.

"This is so good of you, dear Mr. Oakley," she told him in italics. "Do go into the drawing-room, to my dear Louis; you will have no one to interrupt you; the rest of our party are all down at the church."

Sweetly as she spoke, Mr. Oakley felt as if she wanted to disappoint him, and he made no answer but a bow, as he followed her into the room.

"Here is a charming surprise for you, dear Louis," she said. "Mr. Oakley has come all this way through the mud to see you."

"I am sorry you troubled him, mother," returned

the uncompromising son; but he looked pleased as his friend shook him by the hand, and the lady softly withdrew, leaving them together.

"Louis, you are over-thinking or over-working yourself, do you know? I don't like your looks at all."

"Neither does my mother. She thinks something is the matter with me, and she does you the compliment of sending for you, as an eminent mental dentist, to extract the painful secret. Only, my dear Mr. Oakley, don't try; it won't pull out, and you'll only hurt me horribly."

"I certainly shall try nothing of the kind. I shall be physician, and not dentist (much more *genteel*, you know); I shall prescribe, not pull. You are not to study and overdo yourself, do you hear? You are not looking half the man you did a month ago."

"Confound my looks a month ago! I beg your pardon, but such are my sentiments. Let us talk cheerfully; let me tell you the news. I ought to have 'cheerful social intercourse,' the doctor told my mother; and so she has been sending Prissie at intervals, whenever I happened to be particularly busy, to oblige me with paragraphs out of the papers. But now let me tell you the news. 'An elegant and fashionable marriage has been arranged,' as the

papers say—arranged between Sir Arthur Marston and one of my cousins."

Louis felt as if he must speak of it; and yet he shirked the name, thus greatly disturbing Mr. Oakley's mind.

"May I ask which of your cousins?" he asked, rather hoarsely.

"Which! Why, you do not suppose he would have anything to say to Attie! No, it is poor little Milly."

Mr. Oakley sat looking straight before him, making no reply.

"Where are your manners?" Louis went on. "Are we to have no congratulations on this distinguished alliance? I believe it is a secret, by the way, and my aunt will not allow a formal engagement. Ladies' arrangements are so mysteriously interesting. But, as I have confided it to you, you might congratulate me."

Mr. Oakley held out his hand, with a grave tenderness in his look that brought the colour into Louis's cheeks.

"Never mind talking; I think I understand," he said.

Louis snatched away his hand and dashed it across his eyes; this friend had the friend's faculty for bringing out what he really felt.

"Oh, Mr. Oakley!" he groaned, "I am the most miserable wretch that ever walked—no, that ever didn't walk;" he corrected himself with a little laugh.

"My dear boy, there are some things no one can walk away from."

"It seems to me, if you could only get up and rage about, things would not seem so bad. But to lie still and let them rack you, it's hard work," Louis said.

Mr. Oakley was very soft-hearted; the sight of Louis's misery touched him deeply, though it only made him look awkward and rough. He averted his eyes from the white, excited face, and looked at the impossible roses on the carpet.

"I don't want to cry out," Louis went on; "there's pain enough in the world, and I must look out for my share. If I had a safety-valve I think I wouldn't make an indecent outcry. If I could what you call sin, I should be easier. I should just like to get up and rush out, and drink, and swear, and gamble, and get a little of this mad feeling out of me."

"And soil manhood and dignity, and come back with black memories, the heaviest burden of all! God forgive you, Louis. You don't know what you are talking about."

"God forgive me! Oh! if He is, He does forgive me. He knows how I feel."

Mr. Oakley got up and walked to the window, saying nothing for a while. At last Louis called him.

"I know what you are doing," he said, trying to smile; "you are having recourse to your spiritual advocacy for me. Don't! I don't want to be prayed for."

"Yes, you do. You have the susceptible artist temperament, and the sin against faith is against your own nature. There are sins that, even were there no such a thing as guilt, a man ought not to sin for his own sake. Besides, you know I think with the blameless king," and he repeated King Arthur's words on prayer.

The other shook his head wearily.

"What good does it do?" he repeated—"what good? And yet somehow your mind dominates mine. You make me try to see things as you do; and sometimes it seems as if the great Power you speak of must be very near me. I have almost prayed myself lately. No matter. Perhaps sufferings are some people's prayers. Then I go on groaning, like an old crone with rheumatism. What a life! Lying here to groan to you; or purred over, petted, pitied, and ruled by these soft, innocent, crafty women. What a life!"

"That will not be your life; you will feel differently by-and-by."

"Differently by-and-by! Is that the way you console me?" cried Louis, changing to his painful sneer. "Talk more sentimentally, Mr. Oakley. You have never been in love, no doubt, or you would not propose such a painful thought for consolation. What! all my little flowers of sentiment are to be swept away by the scythe of time (see how poetical I am), and you call that consolation!"

Mr. Oakley looked embarrassed, and did not reply.

"You have no idea what Milly is," Louis went on more quietly. "Such a dear little girl! she seems to know nothing earthly, but to have a good guess at everything heavenly to make up for it. Such a sweet, foolish little angel never was."

Mr. Oakley patted him on the back, and told him it was good to know an angel who could show him the way to where the angels live.

"No, never now. And Milly is not one to lead—she must follow; but she has the prettiest little fancies of her own. Do you remember the naturalist who used to hide in the woods and watch the birds at play together till they made him laugh, so that he frightened them away? I've often done something like that, lying still and making Milly talk to me. Then her fancies used to come out, fluttering and frisking round me, shy little elves; anything frightened them away again. Now that great Philis-

tine of a fellow will frighten them away for good. Of course he frightens her to death with his ceremonious civilities. She dared not say 'no' to him, and that is how it will always be."

Mr. Oakley received with some reservation the remarks of this jealous rival; he encouraged Louis to talk, however, thinking the outburst the best thing for this volcanic nature.

And, meanwhile, there was only too much truth in Louis's view of Mildred, and her relation to Sir Arthur.

Milly's nature was as yet only partly awakened; she could not tell the extent of the mistake she had made, but there was a vague, uneasy consciousness that something was wrong. When the others would retire so discreetly, as they walked down to the church, and leave her to Sir Arthur, she knew that it was not such a sunny walk for her as Marion's would have been with Henry on the gloomiest day.

"What! five miles!—nonsense!" Marion had said one day, when they were having a walking picnic together, and she had been by Henry's side. "We have not been out a quarter of an hour."

Milly remembered that speech to-day, when they were going down to the church. She was conscious that she was noticing the whole length of

the walk—the muddy road—the gloomy, windy day. She had to think once or twice what she could say to this man at her side. She was quite glad when they reached the church porch, and there was something to do besides talking and trying to say the right thing.

But Sir Arthur, who was extremely devoted to his betrothed, and very much inclined to impress her with his devotion, persisted in attending to her still. He went into the church with the workers, made himself useful in a very magnificent and condescending manner, carrying string backwards and forwards, cutting boughs, and handing scissors. He was not a particularly handy man, and did not strike out any original path of usefulness.

Indeed, Beatrice secretly despised him for having such a fine cut-and-dried theory about art, and yet having no private suggestions of good taste to offer. That was his line; he was not original, but he was strikingly well-informed. He had heard all operas—all oratorios and cantatas and chorales that man could hear. He would point out the characteristics and names of all composers, in the technical terms of the best newspaper art-critics. But he could not have picked out a tune on the piano to save his life; and for all his scientific observations and exclusive esteem of classical music, it is doubtful if he would

have known a fugue of Bach's from an exercise of Czerny's unless some one had told him.

It is needless to add that he greatly admired the music of the future.

The organist was practising as they entered the church; and whilst Sir Arthur waited on Milly wreath-binding in the vestry, he gave her much valuable information respecting music in general, and church music in particular, for which Milly did her best to be grateful. Yet, hide it as she would, Sir Arthur's presence fluttered her; the poor little fingers trembled at the knots, and broke off the choicest sprays in her haste. She wished he would go and help somebody else, but he was faithful; for many a long hour he was by her side, and when he left the church he promised to return and escort her home in the evening. She worked all the quicker when he was gone, and she reasoned with herself and told herself how good she would be to him when she got used to this new state of things. She hoped she should get used to it soon, for she could not tell anybody, but she felt very uncomfortable. The work progressed wonderfully the while; the time flew fast that afternoon; was it possible that it went so quickly because she did not care to hear the hour chime that would bring Sir Arthur back? No, no; it was not possible she could be so unkind.

By-and-by the twilight was gathering again, the gas was lighted in the church; they began to feel that there was no time to be lost now. At last all was finished, the precious flowers even put in their places; the old woman, who came in to sweep up when the girls had done their pretty work (prose after poetry), made her appearance, with a dustpan and brush.

The workers stood looking at their handiwork a little.

"It looks lovely," whispered Prissie; "better than ever."

"Perfect!" Attie declared; she always took a cheerful view of things. Mildred said nothing; her eyes were fixed upon a holly wreath that she had fastened round the pulpit yesterday. How had she felt when she was doing that? Freer, happier than she did now.

It was better not to think about yesterday, there was such a gulf between it and to-day. She turned away with a stifled sigh, and walked into the porch. The mist had cleared away, the air was frosty again, and the stars were shining. She thought for a moment that Sir Arthur had not come; she would walk back with Attie and Prissie. But in a moment he was standing at her side; it was very kind of him to come again, she told herself and him.

DECORATING THE CHURCH.

"Your carriage is not here?" he said, looking round anxiously. "I wish I had brought one; you will be tired."

"Oh no, indeed. We thought we should like the walk to warm us after our work."

"And your servant is waiting for you?"

"I don't see him," said Mildred, peering about in the uncertain light.

"I am indeed glad I came," Sir Arthur concluded gravely.

"Oh, it is such a little way, it would not have mattered."

"Have you forgotten a certain little adventure? I hope not, as I had the honour of first offering my services to you then."

"Forgotten? No, indeed."

"My dear Mildred, you must promise me never to take these darkling walks again, with no better escort than your sisters. It would distress me to think of it."

"Very well," said Milly, gently. But she felt disturbed. Was he not putting new fetters round her? Why should he mind, if mother did not? Surely she knew best; she could take care of us, Milly thought. She said not a word more, as the others came out, and they started homewards.

Sir Arthur shivered, and said how cold it was;

and then he stopped and wrapped Mildred's cloak more closely round her. He did it so carefully that her heart's thought seemed ungrateful, and she reproached herself. "He only wants to take care of me, and I am vexed," she told herself; and she crept closer to him, and looked at the stars, and felt happier.

"Of what are you thinking, little lady?" he asked presently.

"That—that you were very kind," she whispered, with a pretty confusion; "and then that I was glad the stars had come to keep Christmas with us."

"It is chilling to look at them," and Sir Arthur shivered again, at which Milly expressed the well-grounded fear that he was cold. Then they heard footsteps ringing on the hardening road, and a man's figure came towards them, walking fast.

"This would have alarmed you if you had been alone?" Sir Arthur asked, as if drawing a moral; and Milly, with the perverse instinct of those against whom morals are drawn, answered No; she could see it was a gentleman. Indeed, at the moment they heard Mr. Oakley's voice exchanging a "good night" with Attie and Prissie, who were a few yards in front of them.

"There!" cried Milly, with unreasonable triumph.

"My dear Mildred," returned Sir Arthur, vexed

perhaps for his moral, "it was not a garotter, I concede; but you can hardly say it was a gentleman."

"Mr. Oakley not a gentleman! Why, he's a clergyman!" Milly exclaimed.

"My dearest child," with a patronising little laugh, "I have the highest respect for the Church; but a little further knowledge of the world will show you that all the clergy are not what I call gentlemen."

"I shall never know what you call a gentleman if Mr. Oakley is not one," and Milly spoke rather sadly.

"A little experience will show you," returned Sir Arthur, soothingly, for it would never have entered his head that there was lore Milly did not desire to learn. "You will allow me the great pleasure of teaching you. Your delicate tact will soon learn to distinguish, and to treat each according to his due."

"I should like to treat people all alike," answered Mildred, uncomfortably.

"Might I again suggest that the wish shows inexperience, simplicity, which I adore, but which would be inconvenient in society? Your fine tact would soon acquire the habit of treating people as they deserve, with true courtesy. Of course you would be courteous to all—rather more courteous perhaps to those whose station was beneath your own, but with a courtesy that exacted homage instead of permitting intimacy."

Such teaching made Mrs. Braithwaite's daughter turn cold. When had the mother ever taught to measure out kindness, to apportion civility?

She ventured to hint her thought to Sir Arthur, but he politely dropped cold water on it at once.

"Ladies who are not living in society have, of course, no need to trouble themselves with these nice distinctions," he said.

What would this dreadful society be? Milly thought. She imagined some great buckram idol before which she was to be dragged as a sacrifice.

The end of the walk interrupted the conversation. Milly went in silently, and betook herself to her own room to sit down and think.

It was very cold there; her poor little hands looked quite blue, but she made no haste to get down to the fire; not even when she heard wheels upon the gravel, and knew that his carriage had come for Sir Arthur, did she move. By-and-by the wheels went away again, and Attie came upstairs.

"Sir Arthur is gone," she cried. "I beg your pardon, Milly, but perhaps it is rather a good thing. Louis is so rude and cross, I was thankful they were parted."

Milly made no answer, but sat twisting her engagement ring round and round upon her finger.

## CHAP. XI.—DOUBTS AND CHANGES.

MILLY was afraid of herself; she hardly dared look into her own heart, but she was conscious that all was not right there. How was it that she used to be so pleased to listen to Sir Arthur—that she used to feel glad when he spoke to her, and grateful for the way in which he always made her understand that she was unlike every one else in the world for him? When what she now knew certainly had dawned upon her as a sort of impossible dream, it had seemed so beautiful; and now it was dull, commonplace.

Had she been horror-struck when her veiled prophet lifted his veil there might have been hopes for her; we all know that Beauty did get fond of the Beast after all. But the prophet had done worse than horrify, he had wearied her; and oh! when once a prophet bores you, how is it possible to bow before his revelations again? There is no replacing that veil; it is worse than his disclosing himself; you have found him out.

"How wicked I must be," Milly thought—"how feeble, how insincere!"

And yet she was not; she was only "a mere child," and she had made a great mistake. In all the poems and tales she loved the hero and heroine were charming, and charmed each other, as a matter of course; and they lived in an enchanted land, where clouds cleared away from glorious skies, and flowers shone in the "light that never was on land or sea."

When homage was first brought to Milly—when she felt she was being called upon to leave off being a child, and be a heroine, it had seemed to her, in a vague sort of way, that everything would fall into its place quite naturally, as in those romances. The hero, the sunny land, the enchantment would all be there — a calmer Ivanhoe, a happier Master of Ravenswood, a Marmion who would not misbehave for the world—such a creature would her hero be, of course, and she would worship him.

And now the dream had come true; the tale was told, and it was not a bright reality; it was not an interesting tale after all, and Mildred was disappointed. Sir Arthur was ready to do all he could for her; he opened to her the books that most people keep filling in their own minds. Some people have poetry there, a strange tissue of dark and light

fancies; some have only a journal of the life gone through; Milly herself had many vague little fanciful tales. Sir Arthur had none of these things; his mental books were all catalogues of art-treasures, guide-books, historical abstracts and statistics, with a very proper code of morals and honour, and the ten commandments engraved in stone.

He made no reflections on these things, but he collected them, and he was always pronounced a very well-informed person. Worse still, he was bent on making Mildred well-informed too. He considered her his own possession now, and, as he had to wait a year before he might marry her, he thought to use his time well by forming her a little into what he wished his wife to be.

This process did not suit her; she was always looking scared, and scarcely opened her mouth to him. During the next three weeks he was constantly at her side, and Milly grew almost petulant under his instructive words. There was still the homage, of course—still the Louis Quatorze manner she had admired, but with it that other way of protecting her and opening her mind, and a certain little tone of separating her from the rest of the family, as if preparing her for this wonderful society. These things worried her strangely — made her angry even.

"As if my mother's ways are not good enough for any society," she pouted to herself. But, timidly, she accepted all he chose to say; while Attie's odd words and Louis's half-incomprehensible speeches seemed to her so much more interesting.

It seemed quite holiday-work to go and laugh and talk with them, and forget it all, though Louis's laughs were hard to get now; talking with him seemed an escape out of such a grim, colourless world!

She had written a blushing little note to her mother at first, which sounded happy enough; and she often read over her mother's answer, in which congratulatory tenderness was closely guarded by the fear that her little Milly did not yet know her own mind.

"I have told Sir Arthur," she said, "that you are such a mere child I can consider nothing settled for a year."

The words seemed very comfortable when she read them over to herself; but then there was Sir Arthur, so certain that all *was* settled, that Milly could not help a feeling of the irrevocable stealing over her again.

It was one evening, three weeks after Christmas. Louis, oppressed by the general dreariness, and restless with unhappiness, had insisted on recalling

Mr. Oakley, and once more commencing studies, with Attie for a fellow-student.

Poor Mr. Oakley! the Christmas holidays had been dreary enough to him, obliged to stay away, as he felt, from his only bright and genial spot.

When had he begun to feel as if life were full of pleasant surprises—to remember odd, abrupt questionings in a ringing, girlish voice?

It seemed so strange that these bright gleams and fragrances should come into his life; but he could not turn them out again. The scars left by years of misery, the remembrance of heart-breaking sadness, seemed to fall away from him; he began to feel that it might be possible for him to walk in the sunlight, and be glad with the earthly gladness of other men.

And yet, practically, was this thing possible? Would he not be very poor without his fellowship? and did he not know poverty too bitterly well to wish to drag this bright creature down to it? Besides, what would her people say to him? And that painfully civil Sir Arthur, who was to be her brother-in-law, as it appeared? He was always so condescendingly affable, that it cost Mr. Oakley a little effort not to be rude to him. To be sure, Mr. Oakley did not "care twopence," as his schoolboys would say, for this fine gentleman, or for any other; but he could not help the reflection on it.

So, besieged by many thoughts, he held out through the holidays; and now Louis's note came, begging him to come back to his "pupils." Yes, there certainly was an "s" to it, plain enough, though Louis did write such a scrawl.

It was a dreary winter's day, but the note dropped into it like a little bit of sunshine, and Mr. Oakley smiled as he sat writing with that MS. at his side.

"What a long time it seems since the last lesson," Attie said to Louis, as they waited for their tutor. "All these horrid things have happened since then." She had not spoken of the engagement, and she did not notice that he winced under the allusion. It was Beatrice's way to utter her thoughts very frankly, not much heeding their effect on the hearer. But Louis had always been her partner in antipathy to Sir Arthur, and she looked up at him now for sympathy.

"It is horrid, isn't it, Louis?" she persisted.

"How should I know?" he retorted; "I am not engaged, you know."

"Oh! but, Louis, you always cared for Milly as much as I do."

Louis shaded his face suddenly with his hand; but Attie went on—

"And I know you think Sir Arthur is not nice

enough for her. We've always agreed about him; so I may say it to you when I dare not to anybody else. And I am so afraid of Milly being frightened and unhappy; I wish Sir Arthur had never come here! I wish mother was at home!" and Attie burst into tears, in the sudden way she had; she did not indulge in April showers, but in hot, violent summer rains.

Louis neither moved nor answered. Attie had knelt down by his table to talk, and now was sobbing with her head on her hands. It was an awkward moment for the door to open, and Mr. Oakley to be admitted.

He had walked across the room before he saw Attie, who was hidden by the table. When he perceived her, he stopped suddenly, more frightened than he had ever been in his life. He would have retreated, but Attie, suddenly aware of his presence, jumped up with startling abruptness and ran out of the room. Louis looked up and smiled with white lips.

"She was talking about Milly; she does not like this—this affair. Oh, Mr. Oakley! how *is* life to be borne?" he cried suddenly, with a gesture of appeal.

Mr. Oakley took hold of his hand, and began telling him how he thought life might be borne, but

with a not quite steady voice, Attie's distress was so dreadful to him.

"I try to endure," said poor Louis, in a low tone. "I am humbler than I used to be, I think; my life is wearing out my spirit."

Mr. Oakley roused himself to speak of better things, unspeakably comforted to find that his words did not fall, as once they had done, on heedless ears. Then he tried to set to work, sighing as he thought that the other pupil would not return. But it did not strike Attie that she need stay away because of her tears, when once she had left off crying; and the others had hardly begun their studying before she reappeared, rather white and tired, but not in the least out of countenance. Mr. Oakley was certainly disconcerted enough for two people, so it was fortunate she was not. He just managed to shake hands with her, with his eyes on the tablecloth, but he could not find voice to speak, and it was Louis who answered when she asked what they were to do.

Then they all tried to be very industrious, and the girl, as usual, shook off her trouble in the wholehearted doing of the business on hand; but Mr. Oakley was unhappy at the quenched look in her eyes, and Louis was absent and indifferent.

The lesson was ended at last, and Mr. Oakley stood up to go.

"You must stay and have some tea," Louis said; but the other shook his head, and, as if to keep him firm in his refusal, Mrs. Robarts came rustling in and greeted him affably.

Louis's eyes called her to his side; he wanted to make her repeat his invitation; and, meanwhile, Mr. Oakley found himself trying to speak to Beatrice at the other end of the room. He wanted to say something sympathetic, but he did not know how.

"I am afraid," he began awkwardly, and then stopped. "Miss Braithwaite, you see what a clumsy man I am; and if I blundered in when you did not want me, forgive me."

"Oh no; it was only my nonsense, talking to Louis. And as to awkwardness, I think it's the pleasantest thing in the world. I do hate polished manners," she said so fervently, that Mr. Oakley was driven to smile.

"Then I shall cease to regret mine," he said, "if you will believe that there is nothing of the bear about me but the skin."

"I don't believe you have anything of the bear about you," responded Attie, comfortably. "But, anyhow, I do not care what people's manners are, so long as they are not too good—cut about and carved by this rule and that, instead of people being satisfied to be what they are."

"It might be rather startling in some cases," he said.

"So much the better; it is nice to be startled. People's individuality would make things interesting, but this drill of civility—all salute here, all present compliments there—is simply stupid, and spoils everything."

He understood from her vehemence that she was mentally defying Sir Arthur.

"And, oh dear! it's all weary enough sometimes," she added, sighing.

"Even to you?" Mr. Oakley asked gently.

"Not so much as it is to most people," she said, but her eyes filled again; "only I wish my mother would come home; things always go wrong without her."

"I wish," said Mr. Oakley, speaking his thoughts, to his own surprise, "that I could take all your wrong things for you and make them right."

He spoke so kindly and earnestly that Attie's attention was arrested.

"Thank you," she said, very gratefully; and then Mrs. Robarts, having managed to persuade Louis that she did not want this visitor, came forward. She caught the grave, gentle look on one face, and the pleased surprise on the other, and she felt annoyed.

She, so experienced, and so full of tact—she was not going to let these girls get into any scrape while they were under her care.

"What a cold, dark evening for your walk, Mr. Oakley," she said. "Do let me send you home in the pony-carriage."

The gentleman would rather walk, it appeared; and he became a little embarrassed again, as she stood waiting for him to go.

It was not only her manner, but a confused sense of having said a great deal because he felt a great deal, and an agitation under Attie's grateful look. Somehow he felt as if something had happened—as if he were remorseful, happy, he knew not what. It was only when he had got out under the grey sky, in the pitiless east wind, that he found out it was all nothing; only his guilty conscience had given such weight to the merest trifles.

But Attie felt impressed too. How kind Mr. Oakley had been—how earnest and grave! He was like nobody else in the world, she decided, as certainly as if her acquaintance with the world had been most extensive. She stood, with a glow on her cheeks and in her heart, only thinking how kind he was.

Mrs. Robarts looked at her and frowned; she did not understand this sort of thing, and Louis might have his lessons alone for the future.

Things had gone wrong with Mrs. Robarts, and the ruffled temper, usually invisible to any one but Prissie, and perhaps a servant, peeped out.

"You seem very intimate with Mr. Oakley, Beatrice," she remarked, as they went into the breakfast-room together. The table was ready for tea, and Mrs. Robarts sat down behind her teapot frowning.

"I don't know about intimacy. He's a great Pope of mine, though," returned Attie, happily; "in fact, I think he's my most infallible Pope of all."

"That seems to me rather an odd way of speaking, my dear," returned the lady.

Attie stared.

"Oh, I have no end of Popes," said she—"Hallé, and Tennyson, and Millais, for different things. But I think, take him for all in all, Mr. Oakley is the head one."

"My dear, allow me to advise you to confine your admiration to public characters. It is far less dangerous than to bestow it on those you know in private life."

"Dangerous, Aunt Prissie!"

"Dangerous to yourself, for fear enthusiasm should make you forget proper reserve; dangerous to others, for fear flattery should blind them, and make them forget their true position."

"I don't see any danger," returned Attie, flushing up.

"But I do, my dear. Look upon this Mr. Oakley as a very estimable man, who comes to teach Louis, and you will be quite right; but begin to talk about infallibility and nonsense, and you may get yourself and him into some absurd false position before you know it."

"Talk about it!" cried Attie, getting into a great passion all at once. "Talk of such things! Do you suppose I go and tell Mr. Oakley he is a Pope of mine?"

"That is not a way in which to speak to me, my dear. I only wish to take care of you in your mother's absence; and I must request for the future that you do not share Louis's lessons until her return."

Attie felt insulted, furious; she did not understand altogether, but she felt somehow that she was expected not to behave properly to Mr. Oakley, and that it was very unjust.

"Aunt Prissie! what do you mean? You don't understand——"

"We need not discuss it any more, my dear."

And Beatrice, as her manner was when offended, dashed out of the room and ran upstairs, muttering to herself. She rushed into her own chamber, and

marched up and down talking to herself, crimson with rage—talking to herself, and crying a little.

Mrs. Robarts was sitting downstairs, looking calm, but inwardly furious, both with Attie and herself. Temper had made her do the wrong thing, and that vexed her intensely, for her own sake, she was such an artist in always doing the right thing, she thought.

Where was her tact to-day? It is a quality that so often fails, even in those who cultivate it the most, when the temper breaks down. Tact is a parasitic plant, and needs a great deal of self-command for its support.

The rest of the party gathered round the table; rather silent they were, Mrs. Robarts wondering a little what Attie would do. But presently the young lady reappeared, a little whiter than before, but with perfect good-humour, as her manner was after a storm; she never brooded over hurt feelings, but dashed everything off her in the first frank outburst of impetuous indignation.

"No delicacy of feeling," pronounced Mrs. Robarts to herself. But it was not so; only Attie had something better, a whole-hearted purity of mind, that never let her see there was anything to be "delicate" about.

That was an unlucky day, a day of storms and

misunderstandings, and understandings too well. Some days have a special character—you remember them long afterwards; "that good day" and "that bad day" stand out quite clearly from their fellows. This was a bad day for these people, and poor Milly was not to escape her share of its influence.

"Can I get you anything else, Louis?" she asked, as usual, going into the drawing-room at tea-time.

"Oh, Milly, it won't do to have you waiting upon me so much now," he began again. "What will Sir Arthur say?"

"He is not here," she whispered; "you know he dines late, so Aunt Prissie does not like to ask him to tea."

"Blissful meal! Blessings on its head, or rather on its pot! I am delighted to hear it."

"Don't, Louis!"

"Why don't? I am delighted to hear it, because it gives me an opportunity of enjoying your kindness without hurting anybody's feelings."

"Louis, you are very unkind," faltered Milly; and it really was very hard on her; from long habit, Louis had come to talk like her brother, and yet he was only a little bit her cousin.

Yes, it was very hard, and Milly was very defenceless; she had no weapons provided her by nature; she could only repeat helplessly—

"Don't be so unkind."

"Unkind!" he answered, with a sudden change of look and tone that frightened her—"unkind to you! Don't you know that I would die for you any day? only I am a great useless log, that can do nothing—nothing." And the sadness of it all came over him like a wave, and a great sob choked him.

"Oh, Louis! oh, Louis!" Milly cried, trembling, terrified; and then she knelt down by his sofa, as she and Attie had done so often, but not now to talk pleasantly; she clung to him and cried.

Something like a vision of the truth came over her as she was crying; Louis's words, his wretchedness, had revealed so much to her; it was like bringing a lamp suddenly into a room that had been dark.

"Oh, why must we, why must we be miserable!" she sobbed. And the answer came silently—because she was too weak to be happy, too weak not to wrong others as well as herself; Arthur — Louis most of all—who was, as she found out all at once, more than all the world beside to her. And was it all irrevocable now? Her mother's letter said not; but then there was Arthur so certain, so trusting. No, she could not change now, she could not help it all; she could only cry over it, and she did cry, very piteously.

Louis was quite calm again, she found, and trying

to calm her, soothing and petting her like a child; but she could not stop her tears, and when she heard the others coming she fled upstairs, and did not come down again that night.

From that day Louis felt that Mildred was changed to him, changed indeed to them all; she had a certain reserve and dignity of manner curiously unlike her old self. With Louis she was more distant than he could realise at first. It seemed as if it must be by accident that Attie or Prissie waited on him—that it was his mother who was arranging his books, or a servant who was filling his inkstand. Milly used to seem so happy in doing these little offices for him; but the days went on, and her sweet little services were never ready for him, her place always vacant at his side. Then he began to understand more about it, and to be more thoughtful and silent than they had ever known him.

Mr. Oakley could not cheer him any more; and the tutor too looked blank when he found only one pupil waiting for him. Those were gloomy days for them all in the beginning of that year. Sir Arthur alone was cheerful and well-behaved, like that irritatingly excellent person, Folko von Montfaucon, in "Sintram." But Attie liked him none the better for his goodness. There is nothing more dangerous than to show yourself brilliantly irreproachable; the

perversity or jealousy of human nature incites everybody then to try and reproach you. It is indeed necessary to be *sans peur* if you insist on showing yourself *sans reproche*.

This hero was a constant visitor, and Milly, feeling very guilty towards him, did her best to respond to his efforts to form her mind, and listened to all he said with a strained attention he could not understand.

"I will be good to him; I will keep my word," she protested to herself, with a vague sense of crime and expiation.

Even Beatrice began to think her sister must be a great deal happier with Sir Arthur than she had at first imagined.

Louis was lying one afternoon, wearily wishing he knew not what; and Milly, who would never be alone with him now, had just followed the others away, casting a strange, wistful look at him as she stood in the doorway. Certainly Milly was doing wrong with so much difficulty that it was no wonder she mistook it for right. Louis had that last little picture of her in his mind, and was going over it again and again—the little graceful figure, the drooping dark eyes, the languid, reluctant movement—when Attie ran in.

"Look here, Louis," she said; "here is a letter

from mother, quite in spirits about Lily. She is much better. Mother took her up to London, to see Sir Henry Bewley, yesterday. They are charmed with him, and mother says she shall never be satisfied till Aunt Prissie has taken you to him. He thinks Lily will be all right soon, and we may go down to them as soon as we like. We are to stay at St. Leonards till the weather gets a little better, and then go to the South of France, somewhere. Fancy our scattering like that!"

Louis sighed; it seemed to him as if he had been expecting some such change and dispersion, and now it had come.

"Doesn't it seem unnatural for us to be going away so far?"

"Everything seems what you call unnatural now. What does Milly say?"

"I haven't shown her the letter yet; she is talking to Sir Arthur in the conservatory."

Indeed Sir Arthur had come to-day with special tidings in his mouth.

"Would my fair lady like to be represented in Parliament?" he said. And Milly, who had already discovered that such speeches were to be taken as preludes to announcements on his part, not to remarks on hers, asked what he meant.

The old county member had just retired, he told

her, and he thought of coming forward himself as a representative of an enlightened conservatism. Milly, who did not know what that meant, appeared delighted to hear it, and made him tell her all his plans. There was no hypocrisy in her seeming interest, only a sweet instinct of pleasure-giving, and that vague, foolish remorse at her heart.

His brother was coming to help him to canvass, he said, and he was longing to introduce Dr. Marston to her; and, with the expression of her pleasure at the idea, the gentleman departed, and Attie flew in with her news.

After this the days grew short with the bustle of preparation, and when the time of departure came both girls were wondering at not being sorry to go. It was so charming to think of getting their mother and Lily again; and Attie could not bear to hear Louis's lessons going on and not to be able to share them, while Milly suffered much more under that nameless estrangement.

So both were ready to say good-bye cheerfully, and Dr. Marston appeared to escort, for the Marstons would not consider a servant a sufficient guard; and a large meeting of constituents kept Sir Arthur at home.

Milly and Dr. Marston seemed drawn towards each other; there was something in the sadness of

the doctor's tone that Milly understood—a hopeless indifference, mechanically veiled.

The 'good-byes' were not without pain, after all, for Louis took hold of Mildred's hand, and kept her by him while the others moved away.

"Milly," he whispered, "we are still friends? You are not offended with me?"

Mildred smiled a little, and answered with that new dignity of hers—

"I am not offended, Louis; but if you are not Sir Arthur Marston's friend, it is so difficult for you to be mine now."

Louis let go her hand with a sudden frown, and then the old Mildred came back for a moment.

"Dear Louis," she cried, with the imploring little gesture she often used, "you know I can't help it."

But Attie was calling her, and Prissie exclaiming that it was getting late; and Mrs. Robarts rustling back for her, she was swept away in the little crowd, out of the door, downstairs; and then he heard the carriage wheels on the gravel.

Louis felt as if the gentle little friend had passed out of his life, and he and his mother and Prissie went home again; and Mrs. Braithwaite's house looked desolate and shut up. The black February bound up the garden, the cold winds whistled round it; it looked like the Sleeping Beauty's palace while

she was still asleep, Mr. Oakley thought, as he sometimes walked past it sighing. Sir Arthur Marston was not so sentimental—he never looked at the place; indeed he was too busy about the election.

People seemed fond of enlightened conservatism in those parts, and by-and-by either the extent of his enlightenment or the extent of his property triumphed over all opposition, and he was elected member for the county by a large majority.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Braithwaite was having the happiness of collecting her party round her again, though some anxiety about Mildred damped her joy a little.

"She is so very shy and silent about this affair," said the mother to the other girls, "that I can make nothing of her; but I think Attie fancies no one can like Sir Arthur, because she dislikes him herself."

"She seems to like talking to him better now," Attie admitted.

"Perhaps she tells the doctor all about it," said Mrs. Braithwaite, with a little pang of jealousy; for Dr. Marston stayed some few days at St. Leonards, and he used to walk up and down the parade for hours, talking with Mildred. But it was of his sorrow they spoke, not of her joy; her gentle sympathy, the mutual divination of hearts ill at ease, brought them together.

One day the doctor had begun, all at once, to

speak to her of his boy. He had never spoken his child's name before since he lost him; but when once that dear word had passed his lips again, it seemed so sweet to repeat it that all sorts of memories were poured out to gentle Mildred.

"The child seems quite infatuated," Mrs. Braithwaite said, "by anything that bears the name of Marston."

## CHAP. XII.—TROUVILLE-SUR-MER.

THE June sunshine was looking its brightest over the shining waters and variegated houses of Trouville. The yellow villas, with their green Venetian blinds and fine red-brick window frames, looked like so many overgrown tulips, and in all the gardens carnations and petunias were blazing brightly. It was early, and no fashionables were out yet, for the clock had but just struck seven, and the postman was hurrying from door to door calling out "facteur" in a powerful voice. The sound brought an English girl to the door of one of the yellow villas facing the sea. It is no other than Beatrice Braithwaite, looking brown and happy, and smiling under her shady hat

Mrs. Braithwaite and her daughters had spent some two or three months in the Pyrenees, and were now staying for a little while in Normandy before they went home.

The postman smiled upon Attie; she was always so eager for letters that they had made friends over it. Attie was always making friends.

"Here is one for *ces dames* to-day," he told her, with an obliging pleasure in handing her what she wanted.

Attie seized the treasure eagerly, but, seeing Mildred's name on it, dashed into the house again, calling loudly for her sister. The call brought Milly downstairs, looking almost as brown, almost as happy as her sister, for a moment.

She had brightened very much during their wanderings, rejoicing in the glowing colours around her as much as Attie did, and making pretty pictures of pretty things. Regularly once a-week she wrote to Sir Arthur, who answered as regularly, giving details of his parliamentary business, to which he attended carefully. Sometimes he would make a useful little speech, full of facts and figures, and then he would send her the report of it in the newspaper.

Mrs. Braithwaite did not know what to think of it all. She was, at any rate, glad to keep these lovers apart for a time. Mildred had looked not quite so bright and happy of late; could it be because they were on their way to England?

"Look here, Milly," cried Beatrice, eagerly; "here is a letter to you from Prissie. Do make haste and open it; I want so to hear how they are getting on."

Milly's fingers trembled over the flimsy envelope, and her voice was unsteady as she began to read aloud at her sister's request.

The letter was dated from Langenschwalbach, and began—"My dearest darling Milly, I know how glad you will be to hear that Louis keeps going on beautifully. It does seem so awfully nice to see him get up and walk about. Sometimes I think it can't be true. Mamma says she shall never be able to be grateful enough to Sir Henry Bewley, or to Aunt Marion for sending her to him. You know I told you about that funny sort of iron frame that Sir Henry ordered, and that Louis used to wear at first to hold him up when he walked. Louis is beginning to leave that off, and goes about the room holding on to the furniture. He looks so tall! Of course he can't go out of doors yet; but the baths are doing him so much good, that I hope when we all get home again he will be able to walk with you from the station. Just fancy! Louis is so funny about it—sometimes is quite wild at being better, and sometimes is as miserable as possible. When I talked to him about walking back from the station, do you know, he nearly cried."

Milly's voice failed her here, and she handed the letter to Attie, who went on—"Mother likes this place very much, and so should I if they would only have the sense to speak English. At any rate, it's a good thing not to be at home, with you all away. If you could only see the place without you, you would

not expect anybody to live in it. Louis often hears from Mr. Oakley, who misses us all very much. He sometimes calls on poor Puck, and condoles with him."

Puck was their pony, and Attie laughed as she read.

"Let us take the letter up to mother," she said, "and then go for our walk."

"How nice it all seems!" exclaimed Attie, as they walked along the row of houses facing the sea; "Lily quite well, and Louis getting better in this wonderful way. How happy we shall be when we get home again!"

Mildred made no answer, but the look of brightness had faded out of her face again, and she was looking very sorrowfully out at the waves.

"How delicious it will be to get home again," pursued Beatrice, "though I do like this place so very much."

Attie did like it very much, and she also astonished it very much occasionally. When all the Parisian belles, who thought three hundred yards a long walk, were seated in rows on rush-bottomed chairs enjoying the sea, Attie would run the gauntlet of them with the most perfect indifference. Their splendid silks and feather trimmings, their marvellous laces and jewels and plumes, shone on her without alarming her in the least. She would come skimming along from the rocks, with her hair

hanging about under her shady hat, her holland dress the worse for sea water, and her hands full of all sorts of marine treasures. Sometimes she would have been exploring the cliff above the rocks, and come toiling in with a great basket of fossils. Finding herself in a "happy hunting-ground" for geology, Beatrice had gone deep into that matter, as her wont was; her head was full of her gryphites, echinites, and ammonites; she bore the satirical glances she encountered as indifferently as if she had been a fossil herself.

"The mad English girl" was rather a topic among the French ladies; they noticed, too, the splendid looks and walk, still more the *affreuses toilettes* of Lily. Lily had quite recovered her strength, and though not so indifferent as Attie to the contempt she excited, she had a certain perverse pleasure in braving it. Mildred, on the contrary, was much in awe of the dazzling triumphs of millinery and dress-making displayed on the chairs, and avoided them as much as possible.

Attie had friends in Trouville besides the postman. She was singularly gregarious, as we have seen; and some of the fine, red-haired Trouville fishermen, with their hard-worked, field-labouring wives, were soon added to her visiting list. Amusing boat stories were told her by the old men who nursed the babies,

and the little white-capped, dark-eyed, serious creatures were often in her arms.

Then there were the proprietors of the Hôtel Garni, where she lodged, to associate with: an old monsieur of sixty, who did the cooking, and usually fled at the sight of his lodgers; a brisk madame of thirty-six, with the shrillest of voices, the most rapid of feet, the keenest eye towards getting her penny's worth for her penny, that ever were known; and a *petiot*, a little creature of six, with dark eyes, an olive skin, and shorn black hair standing up like stubble all over his head. His fond mother believed him a miracle of fairness, only tanned by the sun: he was soon discovered by the Braithwaites to be a miracle for his powers of kicking and screaming, and altogether one of the naughtiest and most spoilt little boys in the world.

This imp was specially attached to Beatrice, whose superabundance of life, and sympathy with all creatures, animate and inanimate, certainly gave her opportunities of being happy everywhere.

Though there was a longing for home in her heart, she was in the brightest spirits that morning, while Milly ceased to smile, and looked depressed after she had read her letter. They went down to the dry yellow sand by the sea, and began walking up and down, Attie stopping every now and then to gather

a shell. Presently Mildred stood still near the water, watching the sway of the waves, till Attie came up and put a hand on her shoulder.

"What is it, Milly?" she said.

"I was thinking," returned the other dreamily, "that, whatever you are thinking of, you hear the sound of it in the sea."

"And what was it you heard?" Beatrice asked gently.

"Something—something about a dream I had last night—a stupid dream, all nothing; but somehow it frightened me."

"But you need not be frightened now, dear, when you are awake."

"Oh! but it frightens me still, somehow. I thought I was standing in a great white place like a tomb, only it was very large, and there was no light in it anywhere but from this ring on my finger, which sparkled and sparkled, and made a sort of twinkling light. And some creatures in white kept gliding—I could not see their faces, for they held up something white before them—till at last one turned to me, and looked with a sort of dead eyes. It *was* so horrid, Attie! And she came up and said, 'Give me back the ring! The ring is mine!' And she pulled it off my finger, and that put its light out, and the place was all dark, and such a dreadful noise came in my ears! I woke up in a fright; I dared not go to sleep

again. What do you think, Attie?" She had turned pale as she spoke, but her sister laughed.

"Think!" she said. "I think you are like—

'The person of Rheims who had the most horrible dreams;
So they fed him with cake to keep him awake.'

Shall I feed you, Milly?"

Mildred laughed a little, but she shook her head.

"But I think something else." Beatrice changed her tone. "I think, if not asleep and dreaming, but awake and sensible, you felt required to give back the ring—I think you would do it."

Mildred shuddered; she had come to think that such an impossibility, such a crime. It was always with her that thought—that she would give all she could where she had given her word; that falsehood persisted in made falsehood worse than had ever occurred to her. She thought, having once been involuntarily false—having once promised what she ought not to have promised—there was nothing for it but to be true to the falsehood. She would not ask to be spared, to be helped, she told herself. This was in her stronger moods; then sometimes, as she was far away from her betrothed, she would tell herself that she could be very happy with him, very fond of him.

The secret of all being that she was human, with all sorts of inconsistencies—strength springing from

weakness, weakness from strength, bravery from cowardice. She could be strong to bear, because she was too weak to resist; she could be honourable at all costs in the present, just from the same timidity that had made her untrue in the past.

It was a strange jumble altogether, such as there often is in the minds of the young. Mildred was one of the many who may go about all their lives in a sort of mist of uneasiness, sadness, perplexity, because they cannot come to a common-sense setting-to-rights with themselves.

Many a young tender heart wearies under a burden that it need not bear, as Milly did. It would be a charity if some one would teach them that justice comes even before self-sacrifice, justice to themselves as well as to others. These morbid, unfair self-surrenders hide from them the one sacrifice of self that is noble and true. They forget that the offering of self is a virtue only when the offering is made at the right shrine. They are like moths dashing into a candle, but heedless of the stars.

Besides, whose self is his own? and who is free to cast his all away?

It was all very well for Sir Walter Raleigh to throw his cloak under the Queen's feet, but he picked it up afterwards, and put it on again.

Milly's decision, at any rate, gave her a little

present peace; she would look about the world—be happy—forget. How insecure, though, is the happiness that depends upon forgetting! She remembered only too often.

"Don't talk so, Attie," she said, shuddering; she would not talk any more on that subject, and Beatrice felt as if the morning were not so bright as it had been. Yet the sun blazed on, till by-and-by they had walked enough, and thought it time to go home.

"Voici de beaux bouquets," shrieked madame, rushing out, with capstrings flying, to introduce them to their breakfast; and they knew that fish, not flowers, formed these bouquets—indeed they were prawns.

"Tenez, tenez, mademoiselle, voici une bête pour vous, un vrai monstre! Est-il affreux tout plein!"

"Va-t-en, Jean, va-t-en mon petiot!" screamed the mother. "Et ses demoiselles qui meurent de faim!"

"Ces demoiselles ne sont pas encore mortes," returned Jean, rebelliously; but Mrs. Braithwaite appeared at the moment, of whom the little Norman stood in great awe, so he fled to the kitchen, and left them in peace.

Mrs. Braithwaite came in reading an English paper, which she always studied religiously. Mildred took up her letter again, and Lily began pouring out the coffee.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Braithwaite, looking

up from her paper; "here is some news about a friend of ours."

Mildred coloured; she expected some speech of Sir Arthur's, but Mrs. Braithwaite read—

"The Rev. John Oakley, second master of St. Peter's Grammar School, Middleborough, has been presented to the living of Norton, near Middleborough. The living is valued at eight hundred per annum, and is in the gift of Sir Henry Bird of Norton Hall."

"That's Henry Bird, old Dr. Bird's nephew," explained Mrs. Braithwaite. "I daresay the old doctor advised it; he always thought so much of Mr. Oakley."

"He knew him very well," said Attie, as if that sufficiently accounted for it; and then she became silent and thoughtful. No more lessons! No more sight of Mr. Oakley, perhaps! She remembered how kind he was, how specially kind that day when she was unhappy; and she felt very, very sorry to think that he was going away. Somehow there was a dreariness about that day which could not be shaken off. Attie did not know how to settle to her sketching that morning, and in the afternoon she invited Lily to a fossil scramble.

"Are you sure you won't break me again," said Lily, laughing.

"I should think you are not so brittle now," returned Attie; and they started forth boldly, though many fashionable heads from the rows of chairs were turned contemptuously after them.

"Sont-elles Anglaises!" exclaimed a Léonie in pearl-grey silk to a Justine in amber satin, as the shady hats, the thick gloves, the holland dresses were watched upon their way.

"Mais que font-elles? Que font-elles?"

Their object was discussed, their appearance torn to pieces; but, quite unconscious of the painful process, Attie and Lily made their way to the cliff above the Trouville rocks, where they had a fine fossil-hunt, and came upon many treasures. It must be owned that Lily's geology was very dubious; she usually picked up everything she could carry, and took it to Attie to know if it was worth keeping. Lily had recovered her own unusual strength, and the amount of stones she could lift at once was really astonishing.

The sisters laughed and chatted over their science; Attie became, in a toilette point of view, rapidly the worse for wear. Her dress was caught upon a projecting rock and torn across; it was stained with earth and stones. When at last, quite wearied, and with a heavy basket, she sat down to rest, her eyes wandered sadly to her skirt, and she exclaimed, "Oh, dear! what a dreadful mess I am in!"

Lily did not reply; she had gone a little further round a point to investigate some possible treasures, and Attie, feeling too tired to follow her, sat waiting and looking at the sea. It was a pretty view, with the sparkling water before her, the bold outline of the coast on either hand, the passing boats.

She sat looking and thinking, with her hat pushed back, and the pleasant wind cooling her cheeks, when the sound of footsteps startled her. She was used to having this fossil-ground to herself; no visitors seemed to think of coming there, and the fishermen used to go straight down to the water. For once Attie was brought to a sense of her unpresentable condition, and she made a little effort to arrange her drapery so as to hide the tatters; she pulled her hat over her face and sat still, hoping the intruder would soon pass by. But the intruder seemed to have no idea of passing by; the footsteps came nearer with a rapid stride, some one stepped up to her, there was a gentle word of greeting, a hand held out, and Attie started up, forgetting all about the rags.

"Mr. Oakley! Have you dropped from the clouds?"

"No;" he hesitated, as if he were not quite sure. "Were you not in the clouds just now? If so, I have come up to them."

"SHE SAT LOOKING AND THINKING."

"We saw about Norton in the papers this morning," said Attie, eagerly. "Is it true?"

"I came to tell you about it. Thank you for being interested." He seemed a good deal confused. "I came here to tell you," he went on.

"Here! What!—to Trouville?"

"To Trouville—yes." He was more embarrassed now; he stood up before her as if he had a lesson to say, over which he was stumbling. Attie looked up, Mr. Oakley looked down, and so somehow their eyes met. How many words does it take to make things plain when people understand each other by nature?

Mr. Oakley and Attie were never quite sure how he managed to begin, but certainly he had quietly taken her hand a minute or two later, and was telling her that he loved her. She had never felt so astonished in her life. Mechanically she pulled away her hand, and looked away to the sea. There all the waves had turned giddy and reeling; two little white-sailed ships were looking so weird, that she fixed her eyes upon the ground again instead. But there Mr. Oakley's feet became so prominent that it was too upsetting.

He went on speaking bravely enough when he had once begun—telling her how he had loved to be near her, and how he had missed her; and how he had thought this new life of his might give him an

opportunity of telling her what he had never thought to say.

How true, how plain and manly his words were, Attie thought; she believed every syllable he said, and it was very pleasant to hear him. She listened, not thinking of answering any more than she would have answered a strain of music. Poor Mr. Oakley wanted to be answered, though, and he was stopping and looking to see what answer she would give, when Lily came suddenly back upon them, and stood in speechless—in utter surprise.

"Tell her," said Beatrice, looking up with a glittering smile.

"But what shall I say?" he asked awkwardly. "Can I say that I have hopes of being very happy?"

"Of course," returned Attie. "Say it's—it's all right, if mother does not mind."

Lily heard, of course, but in absolute silence; she really could not think of a word to say. She felt rather in the way, too; but she must escort the singular creatures home.

What the French ladies could have thought of Beatrice that afternoon it is hardly possible to guess. The injured dress, the flushed cheeks, the hat pulled over her eyes; and then the awkward Englishman beside her, carrying a basket! It was a wonderful spectacle. But what did Attie care?

She was too happy even to think how happy she was; everything was in confusion to her, and she passed the ladies in perfect unconsciousness. So did Mr. Oakley; his feelings were by no means what Sir Arthur's might have been under similar circumstances.

When they had nearly reached home, however, Attie had sufficiently recovered her senses to exclaim how surprised mother would be to see them! Mr. Oakley hastily said he had already had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Braithwaite; it was she who had told him where to find them.

Attie coloured a little more, and laughed as she ran into the house. Jean came bounding to meet her.

"Arrivez-donc, mademoiselle," he screamed.

"Tais-toi donc mon petiot," shrilled his mother, as usual, from behind. "Ah! quel malheur! Voilà une robe d'abimée," she added, catching sight of the young lady. But Attie only laughed, as she ran upstairs and dashed into her mother's room.

Lily and Mr. Oakley, both a good deal alarmed at each other, remained in the passage for a moment, after which it occurred to Lily to take him into the sitting-room, where she shut him up.

Meanwhile Attie was hugging Mrs. Braithwaite till she cried out for mercy; then the girl turned to

Milly, who was looking on pale and sad, and hugged her too.

"Well, Attie, where have you been? and what have you been about?" asked the mother. "What have you done with my very tiresome visitor?"

"I don't think you have any tiresome visitor, mother," returned Attie.

"A visitor who has been here frightening and teasing me very much," pursued Mrs. Braithwaite; "till, not knowing how to get rid of him, I sent him down to you. I suppose he carried you the same long story he brought to me."

"Was it a long story, mother? It was a very nice one."

"You think so? Well, Attie, I think Mr. Oakley very good and very estimable; but I think you hardly know enough of him to answer the question he asked me this afternoon."

"I know him perfectly, mother—better than anybody in the world."

Mrs. Braithwaite sighed; these difficulties were always coming now, she thought. She repeated her old decision.

"At any rate, I can look upon nothing as settled at present," she said.

"Dear mother, it's all so wonderfully settled, you don't know!"

Mr. Oakley certainly seemed to think so. He established himself in a hotel near, from whence he appeared to command a fine view of their proceedings, for no sooner was Beatrice out of doors than he was at her side. They had the most delightful excursions together; Mrs. Braithwaite and the sisters escorted them past the habitable regions, and then those two used to walk off together in the most natural manner possible, sketching, fossil-hunting, talking. Mr. Oakley did not seem to want words now; the past, the present, the future—they talked of them all with the delight of mutual understanding.

Mr. Oakley was happy, with the wonderful intensity of a man who can appreciate happiness keenly, and has known but little of it. It is not everybody who knows how to wear the precious gift of joy, when it falls in its glittering unspeakable brightness among his earthly treasures. But this man had that wonderful happiness in being happy which comes perhaps only to such conscious spirits, and is that crowning touch of bliss that matches the conscious bitterness of their pain.

Milly looked at those two sometimes with a sinking heart; that they were so very right made her see herself the more so very wrong. She thought of her own constraint at Sir Arthur's side, under his

too evident efforts to improve her. Mr. Oakley made no such effort; his eyes always followed Beatrice with delighted satisfaction in all she said and did. Yet Beatrice said she was always learning from him, and she grew more dignified, more irreproachable in the matter of the toilette, quieter.

"I must look respectable, now I belong to *him*," she said, laughing, to Mildred.

"But he does not want to change her," thought Milly, with a little bitterness.

The bright days of their visit were gliding away. July came; the place would be deserted in another month, madame said. Mildred looked sorrowful now —seldom spoke or smiled.

"Lily," said Mrs. Braithwaite suddenly one day as they sat together, the lovers wandering in one direction, Mildred in another—"I am disturbed about that child Milly. I feel sure now that she is not happy in that wretched engagement; but she will not speak to me on the subject."

"Yes, mother," said Lily, softly. "I thought there must be something wrong, but she will not hear a word about it."

"Nonsense! Not hear a word about it! I have several words to say, which I only waited to speak till I was pretty sure of the matter. I have no notion of people being 'more nice than wise.' A

straightforward explanation is worth all the morbid, sensitive silences in the world; it's the stitch in time that saves nine. I shall speak to Milly at bed-time to-night."

Lily approved, and she kept Attie downstairs that evening, while Mildred went to her mother.

Mrs. Braithwaite was sitting in her dressing-gown, looking out of her window at the moonlight on the water.

"Mother," said Milly, softly, "you always say you can't bear to see the moonlight. What are you looking out for?"

"I wasn't thinking of it," she said. "No; moonlight's a cold, uncomfortable affair. Come here, though, and let us have a little talk."

Milly put down her candle, and came and knelt down by her mother, clasping her hands on the window-seat, and looking out silently.

"My dear," Mrs. Braithwaite began, with an effort, "the most ridiculous thing in the world is not to speak out plainly when there is anything to say. I don't want to distress you, but it seems to me that you are not happy. I want you to tell me why."

"Not happy, mother?" she repeated, dreamily. "Am I not happy?"

"Sometimes I fear not when I look at you. But I

hope it is all about something that can easily be set to rights now, though it might come to be hard enough in the future."

Milly felt as if it would be hard enough to set her trouble to rights now; she felt that she belonged to Sir Arthur—that a fate had closed on her—that she could not be helped any more.

"I don't know," she said, vaguely.

"Don't know what, Milly?"

"How I can help being unhappy."

"Nonsense! There is, I believe, no reason why you should be unhappy at all, if you'll only tell me all about it."

No reason for her misery! And yet it was so great! Milly burst into tears.

"Oh, mother, I am afraid you can't help it. Perhaps I did wrong about Sir Arthur—did not know him enough. But it cannot be helped now."

"Not now! Why, this is the very time for making sure. That was why I would not have a regular engagement."

"But he trusts me, and I can't deceive him."

"That is true; you must not deceive him; you must tell him the truth."

"I must keep my word."

"Your word! You silly child, it was my word; you are only baby, and had no word to give. I only

consented to your being left free to make up your mind."

"But I must do as I said I would," she sobbed still; and Mrs. Braithwaite had a long task before she could draw out from her daughter all the tangled thread—the doubts, the misery, the conscientious wrong-doing, the useless heroism, the selfish unselfishness.

"And so you went on breaking your heart, instead of telling your mother, you foolish child," said Mrs. Braithwaite, caressing her.

"Oh, mother, I felt so frightened—so ashamed!"

Mrs. Braithwaite soothed her—assured her that the mistake should be explained to Sir Arthur immediately. But Milly could not believe in such a release yet; she went to bed, and cried all night. She looked like a wandering ghost in the morning; and Mrs. Braithwaite noticed that she kept on her betrothal ring, an ornament the mother had always regarded with a fixed hostility.

"I can't help feeling bound till he releases me," she answered, when her mother questioned her.

"That shall soon be done," returned Mrs. Braithwaite valiantly; and she sat down to the most tiresome letter she ever wrote in her life; she made it stiff and short, but plain-spoken and straightforward enough to leave no room for doubts as to what she

meant. Afterwards she slipped the ring off Mildred's finger, packed it up carefully, and took it herself to be insured before she sent it.

Milly looked wistfully after it, and then ran away to her room. No answer came to the letter, but two days later, as the Braithwaites were sitting together one afternoon, the gentleman they were all thinking about appeared at the door asking for admittance.

They saw him pass the window, and Lily fled with Beatrice; but Milly, looking white and faint, kept her place by her mother's side.

Correct, gentlemanly, irreproachable as ever, Sir Arthur stood before them. He shook hands with Mrs. Braithwaite, bowed low to Mildred, and began to speak with his unfailing conventional ease.

"It is so hard to believe," he said, "what we wish not to believe, that I have come over in hopes of obtaining some mitigation of my sentence."

He made a point of appealing to Mrs. Braithwaite, of looking at her, for he noticed how white Mildred became at the sight of him.

"Indeed, Sir Arthur, it was the least hard sentence I could think of; to go on misunderstanding, and trying to arrange what could never really be arranged, would be the hardest of all, I think."

"Thank you. I know how great is your consider-

ation. But might I not yet hope—yet wait a little longer for my final answer?"

"Do not wish it," said Mrs. Braithwaite; "I feel that our uncertainties and stipulations have been unfair enough on you as it is. Milly is very much distressed at her part of the mistake; but I am sure you will understand how easily that might come about."

Milly might see these things in the moonlight of poetry and pathos; Mrs. Braithwaite only showed them in the bright, homely gleam of a comfortable fire. Sir Arthur felt as if he might not use any tragedy in his appeal—any more appeals, indeed. He might be ill-used—he rather thought he was—but he was not going to say so. It seemed to him strange to be confronting that shrinking little girl over there, as if he had some complaint against her. He had had a notion that she was very fond of him—that the sight of him would put fancies to flight, and bring her back to her allegiance. Now, as he looked at her, he was undeceived. It was not a pleasant sensation, but he made the best of it, and sustained his *rôle* of *sans reproche* to the last.

"I am very, very far from wishing to trouble you," he said, coming across to Mildred, and taking hold of her hand. Naturally she instantly began to cry.

"Pray—pray do not distress yourself" (he was almost disconcerted); "you have nothing to regret, I

am sure; that must be left for me. Only forgive me for causing you any pain."

"I am so sorry," sobbed Milly.

"Be anything but that. Allow me to thank you for the pleasant hours I have passed in your company, and let me hope at least for your friendship in the future."

Sir Arthur felt as if he were saying exactly the right thing, and that feeling is its own reward; it carried him through the mortification of a refusal—here, where he thought he had bestowed such a favour; and he took his leave of the mother and daughter in quite a graceful way. He felt annoyed, of course, and sorry too; but he went to the best hotel and ordered a very good dinner; and, when he had rested enough from his journey, he returned to London. His share of the burden that had crushed little Mildred so was light enough; these things are very unequally divided.

Milly still drooped after he was gone; she was so much ashamed and afraid of having given him pain, and she wandered about, looking so white, that the French ladies used to call her the "English Spectre."

Meanwhile Mrs. Braithwaite was longing to be home again; and one bright July day they turned their backs upon fair France, and started for the English shore.

## CHAP. XIII.—A CALM EVENING.

IT was the evening of a bright Sunday in September, some two months after the Braithwaites had left Trouville, and Milly was walking with her sisters across the fields to church. Attie looked full of sunshine, and some brightness had come back to Mildred's eyes. The sisters were talking pleasantly as they walked along.

"It is so delightful to be home again," Attie was saying—"so delightful to see everything you are used to, and some things you are not used to. Especially that!"

She had stopped and looked towards two other figures coming towards them, a tall young man and a girl; no other than Louis and his sister Prissie. The girls hurried towards them; it was but a little way through the field to the church, and Louis could walk it now with his stick. He looked another creature, standing up tall and stately, and with a softened expression in his strange eyes.

He had been very happy the last month or so, and

very good. Prissie was delighted to get him home again, and show him to his cousins.

They met now with a quiet greeting, and walked on to the church together; there are no words to tell how peacefully the prayers and psalms sounded to Mildred, as she joined in them by Louis's side.

They came out again, into the soft yellow moonlight, and Louis followed the others more slowly with Mildred. They walked silently at first, through the sweet, fresh evening scents, and the light evening breeze. At last Louis said, in a gentle voice that seemed to suit the scene—

"Milly, I have not been able to tell you before how happy this news about you has made me. I feel as if we were two sailors who had escaped drowning in a shipwreck, and were talking over their rescue upon the shore."

She coloured and smiled, but made no other answer.

"We parted in the height of the storm, I think, and now we are safely landed."

"It is beautiful to be safe," murmured Milly. "And now we can feel it better."

"My storm was fiercer than yours, Milly," he went on, looking down at his long black shadow gliding over the short grass; "I ran a greater risk—the risk of a wreck for ever; it seemed sometimes as

if there could be no escape for me—as if it must always be dark. But slowly, ever so slowly, the light came to me; and then it was as if I had been blind not to see it all the time."

"You were looking for it?" said Milly.

"Looking! Yes, but after I had wilfully turned from it. God forgive me! Do you remember once, my dear, asking me about that confirmation? I would not listen to you; I had a bad way of arguing about things then. But sorrow and joy have both taught me something since; Mr. Oakley told me life would teach me more than my own thoughts, and its great experience has taught me, and I am learning every day. I hope to take your advice soon."

Mildred bowed her head, and thanked God silently.

"You have been the good angel of my life," Louis went on. "Dear Milly, I shall always think of you so. It helped me to respect right, to see how you followed it."

"Oh, Louis!" Mildred thought of her great mistake, and took shame to herself.

"Yes, indeed; it was my beacon in misery you cannot imagine. Oh, Milly! if people only knew the torture doubts can bring, they surely would not scatter them abroad with so little thought—with no patient trying to solve them. It is the most terrible

cruelty. But I will not worry you with that, dear Milly. I only wanted to thank you; and if ever it is given me to take a man's place among other men, perhaps you will let me show you some of my gratitude."

Mildred said nothing, but she was very happy. At home Marion and her husband came smiling to welcome her, and Mr. Oakley was standing by Attie's side; but these pairs of happy people did not make her sigh now—she wanted nothing when she was with Louis.

We may leave them so, smiling in the yellow moonlight, with this one word, that their future smiled too. Beatrice is a model clergyman's wife, and Louis, after a brilliant career at college, came back to claim Mildred for his own. She had no fear of a mistake this time, and her conscience was quite easy about Sir Arthur, who married a charming wife some six months after he parted from Mildred at Trouville.

Milly was at peace now; but she showed one remembrance of the weary past—she would not let Louis give her a betrothal ring.

MARCUS WARD & Co., ROYAL ULSTER WORKS, BELFAST.

*September, 1876.*

# List of New Books

## JUST PUBLISHED

BY

# MARCUS WARD & CO.

---

***Floral Poetry and the Language of Flowers.*** A collection of choice poems on Flowers, with most complete Indexes to the Language of Flowers, and eight exquisite Chromographs. Small quarto, cloth elegant, gilt edges, 10/6.

---

***English Echoes of German Song.*** Translated by Dr. R. E. WALLIS, Dr. J. D. MORELL, and F. D'ANVERS. Edited by N. D'ANVERS. With Twelve beautiful Engravings on Steel. Small quarto, cloth elegant, gilt edges, 10/6.

---

***Childhood a Hundred Years Ago.*** By SARAH TYTLER, Author of Papers for Thoughtful Girls," &c., &c. With Six Chromos, after Paintings by Sir JOSHUA REYNOLDS. Small quarto, cloth elegant, gilt edges, 10/6.

---

***Landseer's Dogs and their Stories.*** By SARAH TYTLER, Author of "Childhood a Hundred Years Ago," &c., &c. With Six Chromos, after Paintings by Sir Edwin Landseer. Small quarto, cloth elegant, gilt edges, 10/6.

***Stories of Roman History for the Little Ones.*** By CHARLOTTE M. YONGE, Author of "Stories of Greek History for the Little Ones," &c. Illuminated Frontispiece and Title-page, and numerous Woodcuts. Square octavo, cloth extra, bevelled boards, gilt edges, 6/-.

---

***Last Cruise of the Ariadne.*** By S. WHITCHURCH SADLER, Author of "The Ship of Ice," "Perilous Seas," &c. Coloured Frontispiece and Illustrations. Crown octavo, cloth extra, 5/-.

---

***Three Years at Wolverton: a Public School Story.*** By a Wolvertonian. Coloured Frontispiece and Illustrations. Crown octavo, cloth extra, 5/-.

---

***India, Historical and Descriptive.*** With an Account of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-58, by C. H. EDEN. 66 Illustrations, Map, and Coloured Frontispiece. Crown octavo, cloth extra, 3/6.

---

***Notes of Travel in Egypt and Nubia.*** By J. L. STEPHENS. Revised and enlarged, with an Account of the Suez Canal. 71 Illustrations, Map, and Coloured Frontispiece. Crown octavo, cloth extra, 3/6.

---

***Fairy Land: Tales and Legends of Dwarfs, Fairies, Water-Sprites, Elves, &c.*** From the German of Villamaria. 25 Illustrations and Coloured Frontispiece. Crown octavo, cloth extra, 3/6.

---

***Robinson Crusoe.*** By DANIEL DE FOE. A new and beautiful edition, with numerous Illustrations, Coloured Frontispiece and Title. Crown octavo, cloth extra, 3/6.

***The Vicar of Wakefield.*** By OLIVER GOLDSMITH. Numerous Illustrations, Coloured Frontispiece and Title. Crown octavo, cloth extra, 3/6.

***Mildred's Mistake.*** A Still-Life Study. By F. LEVIEN, Author of "Little Ada's Jewels," &c. Coloured Frontispiece and Illustrations. Small octavo, cloth extra, 2/6.

***Kaspar and the Seven Wonderful Pigeons of Würzburg.*** By JULIA GODDARD. Coloured Frontispiece and Illustrations. Small octavo, cloth extra, 2/6.

***Nanny's Treasure.*** Nineteen full-page Illustrations and Coloured Frontispiece. Small octavo, cloth extra, 2/6.

***The Little Head of the Family.*** Fourteen full-page Illustrations and Coloured Frontispiece. Small octavo, cloth extra, 2/6.

***Where the Rail Runs Now: a Story of the Coaching Days.*** By F. FRANKFORT MOORE. With Illustrations. Small octavo, cloth extra, 2/6.

***Dobbie and Dobbie's Master: a Peep into the Life of a very little Man.*** By N. D'ANVERS, Author of "Little Minnie's Troubles," &c. With Illustrations. Small octavo, cloth extra, 2/6.

***Animals of the Farm: their Structure and Physiology.*** A Handbook for Agricultural Students and Farmers. By JOHN F. HODGES, M.D., F.C.S., &c. Second Edition, revised by the Author. Numerous Illustrations. Small octavo, cloth, 2/6.

***Aunt Charlotte's Stories of Bible History for the Little Ones.*** By C. M. YONGE. School Edition. Numerous Illustrations. Neatly bound in cloth, 2/–.

***Wildflower Win: the Journal of a Little Girl.*** By KATHLEEN KNOX. Numerous Illustrations. Cloth extra, 1/6.

***My Dolly.*** By H. RUTHERFURD RUSSELL, Author of "Tom," "Tom Seven Years Old," &c. Coloured Frontispiece and Numerous Illustrations. Cloth extra, 1/6.

***Language and Poetry of Flowers.*** Pocket Edition, Illustrations in Gold and Colours. Cloth extra, 1/–.

## IN THE PRESS.

***Japan, Historical and Descriptive.*** Map and numerous Illustrations. Uniform with "India, Historical and Descriptive." Crown octavo, cloth extra, 3/6.

***The Mythology of Greece and Rome, with special reference to its use in Art.*** From the German of O. Seemann. Edited by G. H. BIANCHI, B.A., late Scholar of S. Peter's College, Cambridge; Brotherton Sanskrit Prizeman, 1875. 64 Illustrations.

***Bards and Blossoms.*** With Twelve Floral Plates, illuminated in Gold and Colours. By F. E. HULME, F.L.S., F.S.A., Marlborough College; Author of "Plants: their Natural Growth and Ornamental Treatment," &c.